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THE
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OR

DISCOURSES

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NOW FIRST DIGESTED INTO ONE CONTINUED SERIES,

AND FORMING A COMMENTARY

UPON EVERY BOOK OF

THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT;

TO WHICH IS ANNEXED,

AN IMPROVED EDITION OF A TRANSLATION OF

CLAUDE'S ESSAY ON THE COMPOSITION OF A SERMON.

IN TWENTY-ONE VOLUMES.

BY THE REV. CHARLES SIMEON, M.A.

SENIOR FELLOW OF KING'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

VOL. XII.

MARK TO LUKE XVI.

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M A R K.

MCCCCXVI.

THE SCOPE OF OUR LORD'S MINISTRY.

Mark. i. 14, 15. Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the Gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the Gospel.

THOSE Christians who have taken up religion lightly, and have not the root of divine grace within them, will, as soon as persecution threatens them, be ready to renounce their holy profession; whilst those who have been influenced by a truly Christian principle, will be intimidated by nothing. When Paul was imprisoned at Rome, some were ashamed of his chain and forsook him: but others “waxed confident by his bonds, and were much more bold to speak the word without fear^a.” This is the true spirit of Christianity, and agrees with the example which Christ himself has set us. St. John was cast into prison for his fidelity in executing the ministerial office. But no sooner did our Lord hear of his imprisonment, than he went into Galilee, where John himself had been preaching, and bore testimony to the very truths which John himself had maintained. The scope of John’s ministry had been, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand^b:” and the instant that this holy man was precluded from any further discharge of his ministry, our blessed Lord insisted on the same awakening topic: saying, “The time is

^a Phil. i. 14.

^b Matt. iii. 1, 2.

fulfilled, and the kingdom of God *is* at hand : Repent ye, and believe the Gospel.”

To elucidate this important subject, we shall shew,

I. What is the kingdom here spoken of—

The terms used respecting it in our text, sufficiently shew what we are to understand by it :

1. It is the kingdom of God—

[Every kingdom may be considered as His, inasmuch as he is the founder of all the empires upon earth : “ he pulleth down one, and setteth up another.” But *this* is his in a more eminent manner. It is an empire which he raises over the souls of men : it is erected, not by means of carnal weapons, but by an invisible and spiritual influence which he exerts over their minds, whereby he “ brings them into captivity to the obedience of Christ^c.” It is not an empire determined by any particular boundaries, but spread over the face of the whole earth. His laws are written in the hearts of his subjects, and reach to the thoughts and desires, as much as to their outward actions. “ It comes not with observation” and pomp, as other kingdoms : it is seated altogether “ within men,” and consists in “ righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost^d.” His subjects have peculiar privileges, such as no other people upon earth can partake of : but these are altogether of a spiritual nature, and invisible to carnal eyes. Their King is ever with them ; every one of them has access to him at all times : and all that he possesses is theirs. His power is incessantly put forth for the protection and support of every individual amongst them ; he orders every thing for their good, and is ever occupied in making them happy ; giving them a peace which passeth understanding, and a joy which is unspeakable and glorified. In short, it is frequently called “ the kingdom of heaven ;” as it well may be, seeing that it is an exact counterpart of that which is in heaven, and differs only from that in its measure and degree. If only we conceive of God reigning amongst his saints and angels in heaven, it will help us more than any thing else to understand the nature of his kingdom on earth : the laws of both realms, yea, and the privileges too, are the same : holiness is the law both of the upper and the lower realm^e ; and happiness in God is their one great privilege. The two are allied to each other as the acorn and the oak : grace is glory begun ; and glory is grace consummated.]

2. It is a kingdom which was at that time to be established—

^c 2 Cor. x. 4, 5. ^d Rom. xiv. 17. ^e Ezek. xliiii. 10—12.

[The prophets had spoken clearly of a kingdom which was to be erected by the Messiah at an appointed period^f; and it was generally understood, not only among the Jews, but among the Gentiles also, that the time was nearly arrived. What the Samaritan Woman said, "We know that the Messiah is coming," may be considered as the public voice at that time. Now our blessed Lord says respecting it, "The time is fulfilled; the kingdom of God is at hand:" and he commanded his Disciples to declare the same; and, in the event of their message being despised, he bade them declare with increased vehemence to the very people who should reject them, "Be ye sure of this, that the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you^g."

This then decidedly shews, that the kingdom here spoken of was the Messiah's kingdom, even that which, in name at least, is established amongst us: in name, I say, because "all are not Israel who are of Israel," "nor is he a Jew who is one outwardly." It has before been observed that this is a spiritual kingdom; and the subjects of it are spiritual subjects.]

This leads us to shew,

II. What we must do in order to become subjects of it—

We have no need to emigrate from one country to another in order to place ourselves under the dominion of Christ. There is a way appointed for all to have their names enrolled among his people; and that is,

1. To repent—

[This is a duty independent of Christianity: every one that has violated the holy laws of God, ought to be deeply humbled for his iniquities. But this is an indispensable requisite for our admission into the Redeemer's kingdom. An impenitent sinner, whether his sins have been more or less heinous, cannot possibly be numbered with his subjects. Such a man hates the laws by which they are governed; he will not yield to the authority which they obey: he even despises the privileges which they consider as their most inestimable treasure: whatever therefore he may call himself, he is, in fact, an enemy, a rebel, a traitor; and as such he will be considered by that King to whom he has professed allegiance — — — In order to become "a fellow-citizen with the saints," he must himself become a saint. Till then, he is accounted "a stranger and a foreigner"^h — — —]

^f Dan. ii. 44. and vii. 13, 14.

^g Luke x. 9, 11.

^h Eph. ii. 19.

2. To believe the Gospel—

[Repentance is necessary to prepare men for the kingdom; but it is faith which actually introduces them into it. The Gospel sets forth Christ, not merely as “a Prince, but as a Saviour also.” It represents him as having borne our sins in his own body on the cross, and as having made thereby a full and perfect satisfaction to God for them. It assures us also of a complete reconciliation with him, the very moment that we embrace its glorious truths. On our believing its testimony, we begin to see the Lord Jesus in his true character: we no more account him a hard Master, but one whose service is perfect freedom. We then long to have our very thoughts subjected to his dominion, and our whole souls made obedient to his will. Thus we become enlisted under his banners, and entitled to all the privileges of his subjects — — — In short, by repentance we cast down the weapons of our rebellion; and by faith we devote ourselves to him as his peculiar people.]

This SUBJECT furnishes us with abundant matter,

1. Of inquiry—

[Should it not be an object of anxious inquiry with us all to ascertain whose subjects we are? There are but two, who divide between them the dominion of the world: Satan is the god of this world, who has usurped a power over all mankind: but of these, Jehovah, the Creator of all things, has a few, whom he has rescued and redeemed from his tyrannic sway. If we belong to Christ, God has brought us “out of the kingdom of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.” Inquire then whether such a change has taken place? Inquire whether you have deeply repented of your past subjection to Satan, and whether with humble gratitude you have fled for refuge to the hope set before you in the Gospel? Can you appeal to God that you have returned to him as a base rebel, acknowledging your desert of death, and imploring mercy solely in the name of Christ? Can you appeal to him, that you do yet daily, and hourly as it were, give up yourselves to his service, desiring to live, and, if need be, to die, for him? — — — O consider the importance of these inquiries, and the proneness of your hearts to self-deceit! — — — And pray to God to instruct you by his Holy Spirit, that you may know, before it is too late, whose you are, and whom you serve — — —]

2. Of humiliation—

[Be it granted, that we are the Lord's: still what cause for shame have the very best amongst us, when we think how little love we bear to our heavenly King, and how little zeal

we have manifested in his service. The subjects of earthly monarchs will go to the very ends of the earth to preserve and to extend *their* territories. Life seems of no value to them, in comparison of the honour of their prince: to die in his cause appears an object of ambition rather than of dread: and the smallest testimony of his favour is deemed an ample recompence for all the dangers and difficulties that can be endured. Ah! who does not blush at the consideration of these things? If called to preach his Gospel to the heathen, who does not demur, and ask a thousand questions, which shew, that our own ease is of more importance in our eyes than his honour? Even a contemptuous look, or a reproachful name, or some little sacrifice of worldly interest, are often sufficient to deter us from embracing opportunities of exalting him. Whose conscience does not reproach him as shamefully deficient in duty to the best of Kings, and in gratitude towards the greatest of Benefactors? Truly when we consider what sovereign mercy, what almighty power, and what unbounded grace have been exercised towards us, we may well mourn and weep on the retrospect of every day, and at the review of every hour — —]

3. Of thankfulness—

[We ought not to compare ourselves with others for the purpose of fostering self-preference and pride; yet we may well take occasion from the state of all around us to admire and adore that grace which has caused us to differ from them. For though, in the view of our high attainments, we have need of humiliation, yet, in the view of our high privileges, we have cause for most exalted joy: and if we felt as we ought, our every act would be obedience, and our every word be praise.

Nor is there wanting abundant cause of thankfulness even to those who are yet in rebellion against him. What reason have they to bless his name, that he has not yet said, "Bring hither those mine enemies who would not that I should reign over them, and slay them before me!" What a blessing should they account it that his Gospel is yet sounding in their ears; and that they may yet, if only they will repent and believe the Gospel, be partakers of his kingdom and glory! People are apt to think us harsh and severe when we call them to repentance: but we call you to repentance and faith, not as duties, but as privileges. What a privilege would those who are now in hell account it, if they could have one more such message delivered to them from the Lord! Know ye then, beloved, that "this is the accepted time:" I pray God, ye may find it also "the day of salvation."]

MCCCCXVII.

THE LEPER HEALED.

Mark i. 45. *But he went out, and began to publish it much, and to blaze abroad the matter, insomuch that Jesus could no more openly enter into the city, but was without in desert places: and they came to him from every quarter.*

THERE is certainly a great similarity between many of our Lord's miracles: but there are in every one of them some circumstances that distinguish them from others; and these open to us a wide field for appropriate and useful observations. There are different accounts of lepers healed by the power of Jesus. The text informs us of one whose manner of applying for relief, and of discovering his gratitude towards his benefactor, were very peculiar.

To elucidate the words before us we may inquire,

I. What "the matter was which he so published and blazed abroad"—

A man came to our Lord to be cured of the leprosy—

[The leprosy was a disorder which none but God could cure^a. The man who was infected with it believed our Lord's *ability* to heal him, but he knew not the marvellous extent of his compassion: hence he doubted his *willingness* to bestow so great a blessing. He submitted himself however to the will of this divine Physician, and with deepest humility implored his sovereign help^b.]

Our Lord with infinite condescension granted his request—

[He was not extreme to mark the weakness of the leper's faith; but, "moved with compassion," gave him the desired relief. As a prophet of God he could touch the leper without contracting any defilement: he declared that the disease should vanish at his command, and instantly, by a touch, imparted soundness to the disordered body.]

He however accompanied the mercy with a solemn charge—

^a 2 Kings v. 7.

^b He came kneeling to him, falling on his face, and beseeching him. Compare Matt. viii. 2. Luke v. 12.

II. What was the injunction given him respecting it—

Our Lord directed him to go to the priest, and present immediately the accustomed offerings to God—

[The priests were appointed judges in all leprous cases. They were authorized to pronounce a man clean or unclean, according to certain marks laid down in the law of Moses^c. When a man was acknowledged to be clean he was to present his offerings to God^d. This therefore our Lord enjoined the leprous man to do. In doing it he would exact from the priest himself “a testimony” to the truth of the miracle that had been wrought, and would give abundant evidence that the person who wrought it was not an enemy to the Mosaic law; yea, he would shew that the worker of this miracle was no other than the Messiah himself.]

He charged him also not to divulge the matter to any one till he should have performed this service—

[The injunction given our Lord was as solemn and strict as possible^e. Jesus might be actuated in part by desire to avoid all appearance of ostentation. It is possible also he might wish not to give umbrage to the state by increasing the number of his followers; but chiefly he was solicitous to guard against the malice of the priests. He well knew that they, from their enmity to him, might be induced to deny the cure, and thus they would both cast a reflection upon him, and deprive the man of the liberty to which he was now entitled. Hence with such solemnity and authority did he enjoin the leper to “say nothing to any man.”]

This charge however the leper did not sufficiently regard—

III. What were the consequences of his disobeying that injunction—

The man could not refrain from “publishing the matter” to all around him—

[He felt in his body a consciousness of perfect health; and, as might well be expected, his soul was inflamed with gratitude to his merciful Benefactor: he never thought what reasons there might be for the prohibition. It is probable he thought the injunction proceeded only from modesty, and the more he supposed it to proceed from this principle, the more would he be anxious to spread his Benefactor's fame. To

^c Lev. xiii. 1—46.

^d Lev. xiv. 2—32.

^e Ἐμβριμησάμενος αὐτῷ, graviter interminatus ei, ver. 43.

offer his appointed gift he went instantly, and with great gladness: but he knew not how to check the ardour of his love and gratitude: nor can we wonder that he overlooked the command given him. We mean not however to justify his disobedience: for the word of God utterly condemns every deviation from the Divine will¹: but the leper's disobedience most assuredly sprang from a good principle: nor can we doubt but that the indulgent Saviour, who well knew his motives, would readily pardon it.]

Though evil consequences ensued, yet were they overruled for good—

[Our Lord's fame spread with great rapidity through all the country. Hence he was much incommoded by the multitudes who flocked around him: nor "could he any more openly enter into the city by reason of them." He was forced to seek for solitude and retirement "in desert places:" but the multitudes who came were desirous "to hear" his word: and occasion also was afforded by them for the working of many other miracles². Thus great benefit accrued to the bodies certainly, and we trust also, to the souls, of many.]

ADDRESS—

1. Are there any here who feel themselves infected with the leprosy of sin?

[The corruption of our hearts is often set forth under this figure: nor is there one amongst us that is not infected with it. Indeed so fatally has it spread, that we may well apply to ourselves that loathsome description³— and, in *reference to this very disorder*, exclaim with the prophet⁴, "Woe is me, I am undone!" Let not any one however who feels the infection, hope to heal himself: the disorder bids defiance to every hand but God's. Come then to Jesus, the almighty, the only, physician of souls: come to him, like the leper, with the deepest humility, and reverence: nor doubt his *willingness*, any more than his *power*, to heal you. Ask yourselves, wheretore he came from heaven? Was it not to seek and save the lost? Wheretore was the fountain of his blood opened, but for sin, and for uncleanness⁵? Let then the declaration he has made, encourage every one amongst you. However polluted you be, he will condescend to touch you, and by his sovereign power will remove the guilt and pollution of your sins.]

2. Are there, on the other hand, any who hope that they have been healed of their leprosy?

¹ Deut. xxvii. 26.

² Luke v. 15.

³ Isai. i. 5, 6.

⁴ Isai. vi. 5.

⁵ Zech. xiii. 1.

John vi. 37.

[There is no injunction upon you to conceal this matter from the world: you are rather commanded to make it known to all around you. He said to the demoniac, "Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee^m." And thus also he says to you. Not that spiritual blessings should be a subject of ostentatious boastingⁿ; but it never can be wrong to comply with that ardent exhortation of the Psalmist^o— or to perform that very duty, for the promoting of which the mercy was vouchsafed^p. Let every one then adopt the language of the blessed virgin^q— but let there be also a conscientious regard to the commands of Jesus. Whether we see the reasons of them or not, we must punctually observe them. Thus will Christ eventually be magnified in our conduct, and sinners will be most effectually encouraged to flock unto him.]

^m Mark v. 19.

ⁿ Prov. xxv. 27. and xxvii. 2.

^o Ps. cv. 1—3

^p 1 Pet. ii. 9.

^q Luke i. 46—48.

MCCCCXVIII.

THE PARALYTIC HEALED.

Mark ii. 8—12. *And immediately when Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, he said unto them, Why reason ye these things in your hearts? Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house. And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion.*

WE cannot wonder that such multitudes attended the ministry of our Lord, or that his occasional retirements from labour were so often interrupted. But it is indeed astonishing that so many should continue hostile to so benevolent a person: and that he should persist in doing good, when his words and actions were so constantly perverted, and made grounds of accusation against him. Having retired to a house in Capernaum, he was soon encompassed with a crowd: amongst them were many Scribes and Pharisees who

came only to cavil^a. Our Lord, however, neither intimidated nor incensed, proceeded in his work; and took occasion even from their cavils to display more eminently his power and glory. Being accused of blasphemy, he confirmed his word by his works, and multiplied his mercies to some as the means of convincing others.

The particular circumstances referred to in the text lead us to consider,

I. The authority he exercised—

Whatever miracles our Lord performed, he wrought them by his own power. A man was brought to him to be healed of the palsy—

[So afflicted was the man, that he was deprived of all use of his limbs. His friends, who bore him on a bed, or couch, could not get access to Jesus^b. They would not however relax their endeavours to obtain a cure. They went by another way to the top of the house, and broke open the lattice, and then let the man down into the midst of the room where Jesus was^c. Nor did Jesus take offence at his intrusion, as though he were an unwelcome guest. He, on the contrary, beheld their solicitude with approbation, and richly recompensed “their faith,” which had urged them to such benevolent exertions. We read not indeed of any particular request made by the man or his friends; but the very sight of such misery was sufficient to call forth our Lord’s compassion.]

Jesus healed not his disorder, but authoritatively forgave his sin—

[All that the man thought of was, a restoration to *bodily* health; but the divine Physician in an instant healed his *soul*.

^a Luke v. 17.

^b ver. 3, 4.

^c Their houses were scarcely ever above one or two stories high. Their roofs were flat, and guarded on every side with a battlement or balustrade, Deut. xxii. 8; thither the inhabitants used to retire for exercise, 2 Sam. xi. 2; for conversation, Matt. x. 27; for meditation and prayer, Acts x. 9. There were two ways of access to the top; one from the inside, by a lattice or trap-door, 2 Kings i. 2. the other by steps on the outside, Mark xiii. 15. Having easily ascended to the top, they forced open (ἐξορύξαντες, ver. 4.) the lattice which was fastened within, and let down the man through the tiling (Luke v. 19.) with which the roof was paved on all sides of the lattice. Some explain the matter somewhat differently. See Doddridge, sect. 45. note (e.)

The disorder had probably been sent by God as a punishment for sin; and Jesus removed his sin as incomparably the greater evil. Yea, he spoke to the man in the most affectionate and condescending terms, and gave him a comfortable assurance that his iniquities were forgiven. How must the helpless dying man rejoice in such tidings! Surely, after this, he would scarcely wish to have his life prolonged; at least, he would desire it only that he might glorify his Lord and Saviour.]

But this exercise of divine authority excited the indignation of the Pharisees—

[It is possible that they might manifest in their countenances the reasonings of their hearts: but Jesus needed not any external proof of their thoughts. He “knew in his spirit” every thing that passed within their minds. They inwardly condemned him as guilty of “blasphemy.” Nor was their reasoning defective, if the application of it had been just. Certainly none but God has any authority to forgive sin; and any mere creature that should assume it, would be a blasphemer. But their objection, in this instance, was altogether unfounded.]

Jesus, having claimed the power of forgiving sin, immediately stated,

II. His vindication of it—

Our Lord was ever willing to satisfy those who desired information; and, by multiplied proofs, to leave determined infidels without excuse:

He now stated a criterion whereby they might judge of the validity of his claim—

[When Jehovah's deity was questioned, his servant Elijah proposed a mean of determining the controversy between him and Baal^d. Thus our Lord condescended to submit his pretensions to a trial. He appealed to all whether the healing of the paralytic would not be an evidence of divine power? and whether he, who by his own authority could restore man to health, were not equally able to forgive his sin? This was as just a criterion as could possibly be proposed. If Jesus were not God, he could never *by his own power* heal the man. Nor, if he were a blasphemer, would God work such a stupendous miracle to confirm his blasphemies. Thus his claims to divine authority were brought to the test; and every person present was made a competent judge of their truth or falsehood.]

^d 1 Kings xviii. 21—24.

According to that criterion, he immediately vindicated his divine authority—

[He commanded the man to arise, and take up his couch, and go home. Instantly he, who before could not help himself, was restored to health; and, in the presence of all, went forth with his couch upon his shoulders. Thus were the enemies of Jesus effectually put to silence; yet none understood the full extent of the conclusion to be drawn from the miracle. They still viewed Christ only as a “*man*” acting by a delegated authority^e; whereas they should have acknowledged him to have been truly *God*. They all however “glorified God” for the marvellous displays of his power; and confessed that they had never before seen such stupendous works.]

LEARN from hence,

1. The power and grace of Christ—

[When Jesus sojourned on earth as a poor man, he had power to forgive sin, and often exercised that power unsolicited, uncontrolled. He even subjected himself to the charge of blasphemy rather than he would conceal his right. Has he then less power or compassion now that he is enthroned in glory? or, now that he is exalted on purpose to exercise that power^f, will he neglect to exert it? Will he who bestowed mercy *unasked*, cast out our petitions? Let us then present ourselves before him with all our miseries and wants. Let us try, by all possible means, to get access to him. Let us break through every obstacle that would defeat our endeavours; and let us approach him with an assurance of his power and willingness to save. Sooner shall heaven and earth fail, than he reject *one* such a believing suppliant^g.]

2. The benefit of affliction—

[If the paralytic had never been disordered, he had never been brought to Jesus. Had he never come to Jesus, his sins had never been forgiven. Would he not then rejoice, yea, does he not rejoice even to this very hour, that God ever sent him that affliction? Would he not number *that* amongst his richest mercies? Thus many of us would never have thought of Jesus if we had not known trouble; but through temporal afflictions we were brought to the enjoyment of spiritual blessings. Let those then, who have experienced this, give thanks to God^h; and let those, that are now in trouble, seek chiefly the remission of their sinsⁱ.]

3. The efficacy of intercession—

^e Matt. ix. 8.

^f Acts v. 31.

^g Matt. xxi. 22.

^h Ps. cxix. 71. 75.

ⁱ Ps. xxv. 16—18.

[Many of us, alas! have friends whose souls are dead in trespasses and sins: their faculties are altogether destitute of spiritual motion or sensation; but we may bring them by faith into the presence of the compassionate Jesus. He will be pleased, rather than offended, with our officious intrusion; nor shall our labours of love be without many good effects. Little do we think how many thousands have been converted in answer to the entreaties of God's praying people; and who can tell but that God may fulfil to us that promise^k—? Who can tell but that, as *an answer to "our faith,"* we may see our friends healed of their sins, and triumphing in their blessed Saviour? We are sure, at least, that our "prayers shall return into our own bosom." Let us then improve our knowledge of the Redeemer's grace, and exert ourselves, that all around us may participate his saving benefits.]

^k Jam. v. 15.

MCCCCXIX.

THE WHOLE AND THE SICK, THE RIGHTEOUS AND SINNERS,
DESCRIBED.

Mark ii. 17. *They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*

THERE is no action, however benevolent, which cavillers may not censure. Every part of our Lord's conduct was worthy of his divine character; yet was he constantly "enduring the contradiction of sinners," &c. He was now conversing familiarly with publicans for their good. This was condemned by the Scribes as unbecoming a holy person, if not also as giving countenance to sin. Our Lord vindicated himself on principles acknowledged by them.

His words contain,

I. A generally established maxim—

Persons desire not a physician unless they be sick. This is true according to its *literal* import—

[A person in health wishes not for any medical assistance: he would refuse it if it were tendered to him; he would not submit to any regimen that should be prescribed. But they who are diseased are glad to hear of a skilful physician: they

will cheerfully put themselves under his direction; and they will follow his prescriptions, that they may obtain a cure.]

It is more particularly so in a *figurative* sense—

[There is an analogy between sickness and sin: *this* is a disorder of the soul as *that* is of the body. A person unconscious of his sinfulness desires not a Saviour; nor will he comply with the self-denying directions given him. But one who feels his lost state longs earnestly for a cure: he delights to hear of Christ, and to make application to him; nor does he esteem any injunction too severe^a.]

This being acknowledged, our Lord proceeds to make,

II. An application of it to his own conduct—

The physician's office leads him to converse with the sick. Our Lord's work required him to maintain an intercourse with sinners.

There are many who conceive themselves to be "righteous"—

[None are absolutely and perfectly righteous^b, but many suppose that their sins are neither great nor numerous. Such were the Scribes and Pharisees whom our Lord addressed^c; and there are many of this description in every age^d.]

Such persons were not so much the objects of our Lord's attention—

[He "willed indeed that all should come to repentance^e," but he knew that they would not receive his offers; they saw no need of the salvation which he came to accomplish; their pride and prejudice unfitted them for receiving it. He therefore bestowed less labour in calling *them* to repentance.]

But there are many of more ingenuous disposition—

[They are not really more heinous "sinners" than others, but they are made sensible of their guilt and danger. Such was the publican at whose house our Lord was, and such are to be found in every place.]

To call these to repentance was the great object of Christ's ministry—

[These were prepared, like thirsty ground for the rain; to them he was a welcome messenger; they rejoiced to hear

^a 1 John v. 3.

^b None by *nature*, Job xiv. 4. and xv. 14. None by *practice*, Rom. iii. 10, 12, 23.

^c Luke xviii. 9, 11.

^d Prov. xxx. 12.

^e 2 Pet. iii. 9.

that repentance could profit them; and our Lord delighted to encourage their hopes^f.]

Thus did his conduct accord with the dictates of reason, and with the great ends of his mission.

INFER—

1. The danger of self-righteousness—

[Men feel of themselves the danger of gross sin; but they cannot be persuaded that they will suffer any thing by self-righteousness. But a person who, under dying circumstances, denies his need of help, as effectually destroys himself, as if he drank poison or plunged a dagger to his heart. Deny not then your need of the heavenly Physician; nor think to heal yourselves by any self-righteous methods. You must resemble the publican, if ever you would enjoy his lot^g.]

2. The folly of unbelief—

[We are apt to make the depth of our misery a reason for despondency; but the doubting of the Physician's power will be as destructive to the soul, as the denying of our need of him. O behold the remedy! Are you sick^h?—sinnersⁱ?—lost^k? Christ suits his promises to your state; He addresses himself to each^l, nor shall any suppliant be disappointed^m.]

^f Luke iv. 18, 19.

^g Luke xviii. 13, 14.

^h Jer. viii. 22.

ⁱ 1 Tim. i. 15.

^k Luke xix. 10.

^l John v. 6.

^m John vi. 37.

MCCCCXX.

THE USE AND BENEFIT OF THE SABBATH.

Mark ii. 27. *And he said unto them, The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.*

IN nothing is the force of prejudice more strongly seen, than in the blame cast by the world upon the followers of Christ for the most trifling offence, whilst the greatest enormities of ungodly men are suffered to pass without any animadversion whatever. Nor is it only for a real deviation from duty that they are condemned, but for the smallest departure from rules, which have their foundation in nothing but human policy or superstition. The Disciples of our Lord had been attending the Synagogue on the Sabbath-day, and, being hungry^a, they plucked some ears of corn

^a Matt. xii. 1.

as they passed through the corn-fields, and ate it. This was an act which God himself had particularly specified as lawful^b; and therefore the Pharisees could not condemn it: but the law forbade men to do any servile work upon the Sabbath-day; and therefore the Pharisees, being determined to find fault, construed the plucking and rubbing a few ears of corn as a reaping and threshing of the corn; and inquired with indignation, Why they presumed to do so on the Sabbath-day^c? But our blessed Lord vindicated their conduct: he shewed that works of necessity or mercy might be performed, as well on the Sabbath as on any other day. He reminded them of David's conduct in eating the holy bread, which was forbidden to be eaten by any but the priests and their families: he had never been censured for it either by God or man, because he was impelled to it by unavoidable necessity. He reminded them also of the priests in the temple, who performed very laborious work in killing, flaying, and consuming the sacrifices, yet incurred no guilt thereby, because they were serving God: and from these precedents he shewed them, that the Disciples were not worthy of blame, since what they had done was in attending upon HIM, and from a necessity imposed by the imperious calls of hunger. The sanctity of the Sabbath he acknowledged; but informed them at the same time, that, where the observance of it militated against the welfare of man, its authority was superseded; for that "the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath."

From this declaration of our Lord, we shall take occasion to shew,

I. The end for which the Sabbath was instituted—

The appointment of the Sabbath did not take place, till the whole work of creation was complete: therefore man, who was created on the sixth day, could not be made for the Sabbath, but the Sabbath, as far as man was concerned, must be made for him. But,

^b Deut. xxiii. 25.

^c Matt. xii. 2. with Luke vi. 1, 2.

without laying any stress on the priority of man's existence, we may confidently affirm, that the Sabbath was instituted for the benefit,

1. Of individuals—

[It is no small privilege to men that God has appointed them a day of rest, wherein they are to cease from the cares and labours of this world, and to attend to the concerns of another world^d. We know by experience how worldly occupations affect the mind; how powerfully they draw us from God, and impede us in the pursuit of heavenly things; and there is reason to fear, that if no such appointment had existed, we should, long ere this, have been immersed in heathen darkness: we should have been satisfied with the things of this life, and not thought of inquiring after any thing beyond. But on every return of this sacred rest, we are reminded, that there is a God whom we must serve, and that there is an eternal portion which it behoves us to secure. We are led to take a retrospective view of our past lives, in order to see what we have done for our souls, and what prospect we have of attaining that happiness, for which we were created, and for which we were redeemed. In short, this appointment of a Sabbath affords exactly the same occasion for advancing the welfare of our souls, as the permission to labour on the six other days does for the advancement of our temporal interests: as, on the six days, we devise and execute plans for the acquisition of wealth, so, on the seventh day, we are occupied in attaining higher degrees of faith and holiness: and as, in the one case, we frequently cast up our accounts in order to see what progress we have made, so, in the other case, the periodical leisure that is afforded us, enables us to ascertain with precision the state of our souls before God.

Who then has not reason to be thankful for an institution which is so replete with benefit to his soul? Well might God number it amongst the highest obligations which he had ever conferred upon his people, the Jews^e; and well may we number it amongst our choicest blessings.]

2. Of the whole community—

[Had no specific time been appointed by God, none could ever have been agreed upon by men: no day would have suited the convenience of all; nor could human authority have prevailed to establish a law that should be universally and irrevocably obeyed. But God having fixed a day, the whole race of mankind is bound to yield obedience to his command: so that all who acknowledge his authority, wake upon the Sabbath

^d Exod. xxiii. 12. Deut. v. 14.

^e Neh. ix. 13, 14. Ezek. xx. 12—20.

with the same views, the same desires, the same purposes; all feeling in themselves an obligation to keep it holy, and all conscious that the same feeling pervades the Lord's people in every quarter of the globe. In respect to this, there is no difference of rank or station. The rich man sees, that he is to lay aside both his cares and pleasures, in order to attend to the concerns of his soul: the poor man also sees, that though he may be, as it were, a slave on other days, on this day he is the Lord's free-man. Indeed the poor have very peculiar cause for thankfulness on account of the Sabbath; for the rate of wages in every country is calculated by the amount that is necessary to support a man and his family; and that is given to a man for six days' work, because God has commanded him to rest the seventh: but, if no such command had been given by God, the poor would have been required to work the seven days without any augmentation of their wages: in this respect, therefore, the poor are peculiarly benefited. But indeed the whole community being thus set at liberty for heavenly pursuits, and means of instruction being provided for all, such instruction too as they would not very readily receive in private, all meet, as by common consent, in the house of God, and there offer their united sacrifices of prayer and praise. From thence all return to the bosom of their families, to diffuse a kindred spirit in their domestic circles, and thus to advance the temporal, no less than the eternal, happiness of themselves and others. Doubtless the degree in which these ends are promoted, must depend on the dispositions of the persons themselves; they who have no desire after spiritual blessings, will make no improvement of the opportunities afforded them: but they whose minds are spiritual, and whose situations in life preclude them from devoting much of their time to religion on other days, will now unite in social exercises, and in heavenly converse, with tenfold pleasure; and their hearts will burn within them, whilst they speak of the things which God has done for their souls. Nor will these persons be contented with seeking good to themselves: they will endeavour to do good to others: they will think whether there be not some ignorant neighbour whom they can instruct, or some afflicted neighbour whom they can comfort. On this day the poor is on a par with the richest: his time is his own, to spend for God, either in a way of personal improvement, or for the edification of those around him.

Suppose then the Sabbaths to be thus employed, who can calculate the good accruing from them to all ranks and orders of men; to the rich and to the poor; to the man in health, and to the man immured in prison, or languishing on a bed of sickness; to those who are advanced in years, and those who are just entering on the stage of life?]

If, from these views of the Sabbath, we are made sensible of its value, let us consider,

II. The manner in which it should be improved—

It is not intended that we should be in bondage, as the Jews were; and much less that we should bear such an intolerable yoke as the Pharisees imposed on their Disciples: yet we are bound to venerate the Sabbath, and to keep it holy. God has enjoined that duty with very peculiar solemnity; “Remember that thou keep holy the Sabbath-day.” In what manner we should keep it holy, the text will inform us: we should keep it,

1. With a grateful sense of our privilege—

[God, in infinite love and mercy, has made this day on purpose for us: he knew how much such a periodical season of reflection would conduce to our happiness, and therefore appointed the observance of it even in Paradise. To us, who are so corrupt and sinful, and are immersed in the cares and pleasures of an ensnaring world, this institution is still more important: and therefore, when we wake on a Sabbath morning, our first thoughts should be, “This is the day that the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it^f.” On rising from our beds, we should shut the door of our minds against the intrusion of worldly thoughts, and should set ourselves to the contemplation of heavenly subjects. We should invite our God to come and take possession of our souls, and to banish from thence every imagination that may interfere with his service, or retard our spiritual improvement. We should consider what great objects are to be attained that day; what innumerable sins to be lamented; what great and precious promises to be embraced; what communion with God the Father, and with the Lord Jesus Christ to be enjoyed; what grace, and mercy, and peace to be brought into the soul; what victories to be gained; what glory to be secured. Methinks, on retiring to our closet, we should say, ‘Now, vain world, begone; let nothing belonging to thee interrupt me for a moment: welcome, precious Bible, thou inestimable treasure: let me now unfold thy sacred pages, and obtain an insight into thy mysterious truths: and, O my God, “shine into my heart, to give me the light of the knowledge of thy glory in the face of Jesus Christ!”’ In short, precisely as a carnal man embraces with avidity an occasion of worldly gain, and uses with energy the means of accomplishing his desire, so should

^f Ps. cxviii. 24.

we regard every Sabbath with increased joy, and improve it with augmented diligence.

That this is really the proper way of sanctifying the Sabbath, we are sure; since it is the very way prescribed by God himself: nothing of a temporal nature should (any further than is absolutely necessary) be admitted into our minds; but our whole delight should be in the God of our salvation^g.]

2. With a humble sense of our responsibility—

[If God has instituted Sabbaths for our good, they are a talent of which we must give an account to him. And O what an awful responsibility have we incurred by means of them! A person that is seventy years of age has had no less than ten years of entire Sabbaths! What might not have been done in that time, if they had been properly improved? — — — When therefore the Sabbath arrives, though we should welcome it as a blessing, we should welcome it with fear and trembling: lest, when designed for our good, it should only aggravate our final condemnation. We should pray to God to raise our minds to the occasion; to spiritualize our affections; to draw nigh to us in our secret retirement, and to reveal himself to us in the public assembly. We should bear in mind, that without Him we can do nothing: and that it is His presence and His blessing alone that can render any means effectual for our good. And when we come to the close of the Sabbath, we should inquire diligently, how far the designs of God's love and mercy have been accomplished in us, and how far we have been forwarded in our preparation for the eternal Sabbath. It is this mixture of "joy and trembling" which we ought to cultivate, as the most desirable of all frames; contented to wait for unmixed joy, till all our dangers and responsibility shall be for ever past.]

We cannot CONCLUDE without adding a word,

1. Of reproof—

[As for those who make scarcely any difference between the Sabbath and other days, but follow their business or pleasure in a shameless manner, we shall leave them to the reproof of Nehemiah^h, only warning them that their present gains or pleasures will but ill repay them for the loss of their souls. Our present subject leads us rather to notice those who detain their wives or servants at home, in order to provide them a more palatable repast. How different was the conduct of Christ and his Disciples! They had been so occupied in holy exercises, that they had even omitted to make the necessary provision for the calls of nature; and were contented to satisfy

^g 2 Cor. iv. 15. Isai. lviii. 13, 14.

^h Neh. xiii. 15, 16.

their appetite with a little barley rubbed out of the ears which they gathered by the way. It should seem that they were regardless of bodily indulgence, when they were called to attend to the concerns of their souls. O that we would learn of them, and imitate their self-denying piety! True it is, as we have said before, that works of mercy and necessity may be done; but it is equally true, that an attention to the soul is a work of the greatest mercy, and of indispensable necessity.]

2. Of encouragement—

[Though the alleged violation of the Sabbath was the pretext for condemning the Disciples, the real cause was, their adherence to Christ. Thus, if some sacrifice of time or bodily comfort be made in order to serve our God, the proud Pharisees, who hate the light, will inveigh against us as violating some duty either to God or man; when, if we spent our time in any other way, they would find no occasion of offence at all. But, if we be treated thus, let us remember who suffered in like manner before us; and let us comfort ourselves with this reflection, that, though man may condemn our piety, our God will both approve and reward it.]

MCCCCXXI.

THE MAN WITH THE WITHERED HAND.

Mark iii. 5—7. *And when he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it out: and his hand was restored whole as the other. And the Pharisees went forth, and straightway took counsel with the Herodians against him, how they might destroy him. But Jesus withdrew himself with his Disciples to the sea.*

THE exercise of benevolence is, in itself, calculated to excite universal admiration; but it is far from producing that effect on those who are blinded by prejudice or passion. They whose conduct is reproved by it will rather take occasion from it to vent their spleen the more. This our Lord uniformly experienced from the Pharisees. A remarkable instance of it is recorded in the text. Let us,

I. Consider the circumstances of the miracle—

The Pharisees, observing our Lord's intention to heal a man who had a withered hand, questioned his right to do so on the Sabbath-day—

[Wishing to accuse him of inconsistency, or a contempt of the law, they asked him whether it was lawful to heal on the sabbath-day^a? Our Lord shewed them, that it was^b. He then asked them, Whether, while they condemned him for doing so benevolent an action on the Sabbath, they were more justified in indulging murderous purposes against him on the Sabbath^c? They, unable to answer except to their own confusion, “held their peace.” Though convinced of their unreasonableness and impiety, they would not confess it.]

Our Lord beheld their obstinacy with indignation and grief—

[Meek as our Lord was, he was susceptible of anger; yet that anger was not like the passion that too often agitates us. It was perfectly just and righteous. Sin was the object against which it was directed; and, while he was angry with the sinner, he mourned over the sinner. Hereafter indeed his anger will be unmixed with any pity; but now it is, as ours also should ever be, tempered with compassion towards the offending person.]

Not intimidated by their malice, he proceeded to heal the withered hand—

[He bade the man stand forth in the midst of all. Surely such a pitiable object should have engaged all to interest themselves with Christ in his behalf. He then ordered him to stretch forth his hand. The man, notwithstanding he knew his inability to do it of himself, attempted to obey, and, in the attempt, received an instantaneous and perfect cure.]

Having thus more than ever exasperated his enemies, Jesus retired from their rage—

[One would have thought that all should have adored the author of such a benefit: but, instead of this, the Pharisees were “filled with madness^d.” Alas! what wickedness is there in the human heart! They joined immediately with the Herodians in a conspiracy against his life^e: but our Lord’s hour was not yet come; he withdrew therefore from their power, and thus defeated, for the present at least, their efforts against him.]

Having thus touched upon the principal incidents in the miracle, we shall proceed to,

^a Matt. xii. 10.

^b Matt. xii. 11, 12.

^c ver. 4. This seems the true import of his question.

^d Luke vi. 11.

^e The Herodians and Pharisees differed so widely both in their political and religious sentiments, that they hated each other exceedingly. But what enemies will not unite against Jesus? Luke xxiii. 12.

II. Deduce from it some practical observations—

My first observation refers to our blessed Lord who wrought the miracle—

[Did our Lord in defiance of the rage of the surrounding Pharisees discharge his office boldly, yet, when he saw their murderous designs, withdraw himself? Then it may be observed, that, *though we are never to decline any duty through the fear of man, yet are we at liberty to avoid the storms which we cannot allay.*

Nothing is more clear than the duty of dismissing from our hearts altogether the fear of man. “Fear not man who can only kill the body; but fear him who can destroy both body and soul in hell^f — — — Indeed so obvious is this duty, that it commends itself even to the most prejudiced and embittered mind^g — — — Not life itself is to be of any value in our eyes in comparison of a faithful adherence to this principle: we must be ready to lay down our lives for Christ’s sake, if ever we would be approved of him in the day of judgment^h — — —

But this does not forbid our prudently withdrawing from scenes of danger, provided we can do it without making any compromise of our fidelity to God. The seventy whom our Lord sent out to preach his Gospel, were told, that, “if they were persecuted in one city, they should flee to anotherⁱ.” And St. Paul, when the Jews of Damascus watched the gates night and day in order to destroy him, was let down by the wall in a basket, in order that he might escape their murderous rage^k. On many occasions our Lord himself withdrew from those who sought his life. And when Paul would have gone into the theatre at Ephesus, the Disciples kept him from his purpose, because they knew that he would instantly be put to death by his blood-thirsty enemies^l. The truth is, that life is a talent to be improved for God, and is not to be carelessly thrown away. We must be willing to sacrifice it, if called to do so in the providence of God. Neither a fiery furnace, nor a den of lions must so intimidate us, as to cause any violation of our integrity. But if, consistently with fidelity to God, we may preserve life, our duty is rather to preserve it for God, than to throw it away by a needless exposure of it to dangers which we cannot withstand.]

My next observation relates to him in whom the miracle was wrought—

[Did the man with the withered hand, in compliance with the Lord’s command, stretch out his hand, and in that act

^f Luke xii. 4, 5. Isai. li. 7, 8, 12, 13. ^g Acts iv. 19. and v. 29.

^h Matt. x. 38, 39.

ⁱ Matt. x. 23.

^k Acts ix. 23—25.

^l Acts xix. 30, 31.

experience the healing of it? Then *we, however desperate our condition be, should endeavour to execute the commands of God, and in that act expect his blessing on our souls.*

Doubtless we are in ourselves as impotent as the man with the withered hand. But are we therefore at liberty to sit still without making any effort to save ourselves? If that man who laboured under a *natural* infirmity had refused to make the effort which our Lord enjoined, he had in all probability lost the cure which, in making the attempt, he obtained. How much more then shall we be left to rue our folly, if we, whose impotence is only of a *moral* nature, decline using the means which God has ordained! It is our *duty* to repent: it is our *duty* to believe in Christ: it is our *duty* to surrender up ourselves unreservedly to God. And if, when called to these exertions, we excuse ourselves by saying that we are not able, we shall provoke Almighty God to withhold from us the blessings which we so greatly need, and which he is ever ready to bestow upon us. He has told us, that “his Spirit shall help our infirmities.” But how will he help us? Not by moving us without any co-operation on our part, but by taking hold of *the opposite end* of a burthen, and bearing it together *with us*^m. Very remarkable is that answer which Jehovah gave to his people of old. The Church prayed, “Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord.” The Lord answered, “Awake, awake, stand up, O Jerusalem.” “Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O Zion.” God does not *need* our efforts; but he *requires* them: and when they are put forth in obedience to his commands, and in dependence on his grace, he will “perfect his own strength in our weakness.”

I call upon you all then to repent of sin, to flee to Christ for refuge from the guilt and power of it, and to consecrate yourselves unreservedly to him. I readily acknowledge, that you are not of yourselves sufficient for these things: but “the grace of Christ is, and shall be, sufficient for you,” if, in dependence on his promised aid, you will address yourselves to these all-important duties. “Be workers together with God;” and he will never suffer you to work in vain. I grant, you are asleep; I grant, you are dead: but I say with confidence, “Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light^o.”]

My last observation is, that if, like this man, you have experienced the mighty working of Christ’s power, you must, throughout the whole remainder of your lives, shew yourselves living monuments of *his power and grace.*

^m Rom. viii. 26. *συναντιλαμβάνεται.*

ⁿ Isai. li. 9, 17. and lii. 1.

^o Eph. v. 14.

[Wherever he went, he was a witness for Christ. And such must you be. You must let it be seen that he both does and will renew the powers of a withered soul, and infuse into it such energies as shall bear the stamp and character of divinity upon them. And one such witness, if he provoke hostility in some, will afford the greatest possible encouragement to others. The Sabbath-day is now the time that our Lord especially selects for the communication of his blessings to the souls of men. But the generality are content with an attendance on outward ordinances, without expecting any peculiar blessing from them. Let it however be seen in you that "his word is quick and powerful," and, that to those who receive it aright, it "is the power of God to their salvation."]

MCCCCXXII.

CHRIST'S LOVE TO HIS PEOPLE.

Mark iii. 31—35. *There came then his brethren and his mother, and, standing without, sent unto him, calling him. And the multitude sat about him, and they said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren without seek for thee. And he answered them, saying, Who is my mother, or my brethren? And he looked round about on them which sat about him, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother^a.*

IT is common for persons to feel an undue degree of solicitude for the bodily welfare of their friends, whilst they have little anxiety for the spiritual and eternal welfare of mankind at large. Hence, if a minister be in danger of impairing his health by his exertions, they are ready to say to him, "Spare thyself:" but, if thousands be perishing all around them for lack of knowledge, they are not so ready to stir him up to increased activity and diligence. The near relations of our Lord were under the influence of this partial regard, when "they went out to lay hold on him, and said of him, "He is beside himself;"

^a Another on nearly the same words (Matt. xii. 46—50.) has occurred before. But on a comparison of the two they are so exceedingly different, that without altering a word in either, they are both presented to the public, in hope that both of them may be profitable, as illustrating different modes of treating the same text.

or, as it might rather be translated, “He is transported too far^b.” It should seem that it was with that view that they called for him at this time: they were afraid that he would sink under the weight of his continued labours. But he felt, that both health, and life too, were well sacrificed in such a cause: and therefore he disregarded their message, and turned it into an occasion of expressing the greatness of his regard for his obedient followers.

From this declaration of our Lord, we shall be led to shew,

I. The character of those whom Jesus loves—

This is expressed in few, but comprehensive words; “They do the will of God.” But what is this will? It includes two things:

1. They believe in Jesus Christ—

[*This is eminently the will of God^c: and till this be done, nothing is done to any good purpose: the persons remain, and ever must remain, objects of his wrath^d — — — This therefore they do in the first place — — — And they do it humbly, renouncing utterly every other ground of hope — — — and thankfully adoring God from their inmost souls for such a refuge — — —*]

2. They seek after universal holiness—

[*This also is the will of God^e; nor are the loudest professions of attachment to Christ of any avail without it^f — — — And this also they do. And they do it unreservedly, accounting “no commandment grievous^g” — — — and in a progressive manner, never thinking they have attained, while any thing remains to be attained^h — — —*]

We pass on to consider,

II. The regard he bears towards them—

Our Lord gives them the preference to his nearest relations, *as such*; and honours them with the most endearing appellations of brother, sister, mother. Now from this we must understand, that,

1. He bears the tenderest affection towards them—

^b ver. 20, 21. ὅτι ἐξέστη.

^c 1 John iii. 23. John vi. 29.

^d John iii. 18, 36.

^e 1 Thess. iv. 3.

^f Matt. vii. 21.

^g 1 John v. 3.

^h Phil. iii. 12—14.

[We naturally expect the warmest affection to subsist between persons so closely allied to each other. But the love that is found amongst earthly relatives is but a faint image of that which both Christ and his Father feel towards all their obedient followersⁱ — — —]

2. He will give them the most familiar access to him—

[His mother and his brethren were all this time without, whilst Jesus and his attentive followers were within, the house: and, though solicited by his own mother, he would not go out to *her*, because it would deprive *them* of the instructions which they were anxious to receive. And who can tell, what gracious communications Jesus will vouchsafe to those who serve him in spirit and in truth? They shall never seek his face in vain: they shall never call for him, but he will answer them, Here I am^k — — —]

3. He will order every thing for their good—

[Any man that is not devoid of principle will consult the good of his family, when the management of their affairs is committed to him. And will not Jesus, who is constituted “Head over all things for the express benefit of his Church^l,” be attentive to the interests of his obedient people? Will he not supply all their wants, mitigate all their sorrows, and overrule all things for their eternal good^m? — — —]

4. He will own them as his, in the last day—

[Suppose him in that day surrounded by the whole assembled universe; and many who were once related to him in the flesh, or who once professed themselves his followers, calling upon him, and saying, ‘We want a nearer access to thee; “we have eaten and drunk in thy presence; we have cast out devils in thy name, and in thy name done many wonderful works;” we are thy brethren, thy sisters, thy nearest and dearest relatives.’ Methinks he will then renew the same gracious declaration that is contained in our text; “Who is my mother, or my brethren?” And then, “stretching out his hand towards his obedient followers, he will say, Behold my mother, and my brethren: for, whosoever did the will of God, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.”]

INFER—

1. How reasonable are the terms on which Christ proposes to acknowledge us as his disciples!

ⁱ John xiv. 21.

^k Compare John xiv. 23. with Isai. lviii. 9. and lxxv. 24.

^l Eph. i. 22.

^m Rom. viii. 28.

[He requires that all who would be his disciples should *apparently* cast off all regard for their nearest friends and relatives". I say *apparently*; for nothing is *really* farther from his intentions, than to encourage, either by *this* declaration, or by that in the text, any disrespect to our parents: on the contrary, we are commanded to *honour* our parents; and are told by the Apostle, that "that is the first commandment with promise." But when our love or obedience to earthly parents stands in competition with our obedience to Christ, then we must resemble Levi; in commendation of whom it is said, "He said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him, neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew his own children^o." And shall this appear harsh or unreasonable? See what Jesus has done for us: He knew not his mother and his brethren in comparison of his believing and obedient people: and shall we prefer our earthly relatives to him? If he has so loved us, who are altogether polluted, and deserve nothing but evil at his hands, how much more should we so love *him*, who is altogether lovely, and deserves infinitely more love at our hands than eternity will be sufficient to express!]

2. What encouragement have we to comply with these terms!

[In complying with the terms which Christ has proposed, and adhering to him in opposition to the will of earthly friends, we may possibly incur their displeasure, and feel to the uttermost of their power the effects of their resentment: they may frown upon us, disown us, disinherit us. But "when father and mother forsake us, the Lord will take us up." His express promise is, that for one father, mother, brother, sister, house, or estate we lose for his sake, we shall even in this life receive a hundred fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, houses, and estates^p. Does any one ask, How shall this be accomplished? We might answer, that it is abundantly verified in the regard shewn to us by the Lord's people: but, independent of that, we say, the Lord Jesus will give himself to us, and be to us more than ten thousand relatives, or ten thousand worlds. Let any one say, whether the love of Christ, the grace of Christ, and the glory of Christ, do not compensate a hundred-fold for all the creature-love, and all the temporal advantages, that we can lose for him? Let the determination then of Joshua be ours; that whatever course others may follow, and whatever obstacles they may lay in our way, "we, with God's help, will serve the Lord."]

ⁿ Luke xiv. 26.

^o Deut. xxxiii. 9. with Exod. xxxii. 26—28.

^p Mark x. 29, 30.

3. How unlike to Christ are they, to whom a compliance with these terms is odious!

[None are so odious in the eyes of the ungodly world as the true, faithful, determined Christian. The generality, instead of loving him in proportion to his advancement in piety, will despise him; and will make his high attainments, not only *the occasion*, but *the measure*, of their contempt. They will be ashamed to acknowledge a pious character as a relation, or friend, or even as an acquaintance. They would rather be seen in public with an infidel or debauchee, than with one who was eminent for his love to Christ. But how unlike to Christ are *they*; when the very thing which endears them to *him*, renders them odious in *their* eyes! Surely it will be well for such persons to consider what Christ's views of *them* must be? for if the godly are so precious to him *because* they are godly, surely the haters and despisers of godliness must for *that very reason* be most hateful in his eyes. Accordingly he has told us, how he will resent the contempt shewn to his people; and that "it were better for a man to have a millstone hanged about his neck, and to be cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of his little ones⁹."]]

⁹ Matt. xviii. 6.

MCCCCXXIII.

THE SPRINGING FIELD.

Mark iv. 26—29. *And he said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; and should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.*

THERE is a rich variety in the parables delivered by our Lord. Almost every thing around him was made a vehicle of divine knowledge. Agriculture in particular afforded him many illustrations of his doctrines. He dwelt on that subject the more, because it was so adapted to his hearers. In the passage before us he compares the kingdom of God to seed springing up in the field. This comparison is applicable to the erection of his visible Church in the world; but we shall consider it rather in reference to a work of grace in the soul.

There is a resemblance between seed in a field, and grace in the heart,

I. In the manner of their growth—

In the parable of the Sower, our Lord comprehends those characters who receive not the word aright. In this he confines himself to those characters that are truly upright. The growth of grace in their hearts resembles that of corn in a field, in that it is,

1. Spontaneous—

[Seed, when harrowed into the earth, is left wholly to itself. The husbandman “sleeps by night,” and prosecutes his labours “by day,” without attempting to assist the corn in the work of vegetation; whatever solicitude he may feel, he abstains from such fruitless endeavours. “The earth must bring forth the fruit *of itself*,” or not at all. There is a principle of life in the corn which causes it to vegetate; nor is it indebted to any thing but the kindly influences of the heavens^a: thus it is with divine grace when sown in the heart of man. We do not mean that any man *naturally* and *of his own will*, lives to God; this is contradicted by the whole tenour of Scripture^b: but grace is a seed which has within it a principle of life^c; it operates by a power inherent in itself, and is dependent only on Him who gave it that power^d: the exertions of ministers, however unremitted, cannot *make* it grow^e; it must be left to the operation of its own native energy^f; it will then put forth its virtue, through the invigorating beams of the Sun of Righteousness, and the refreshing showers of the Spirit of God.]

2. Gradual—

[Seed does not instantly spring up in a state fit for the sickle. It passes through many different stages before it arrives at maturity. Thus also, in a work of grace, “the blade, the ear, and the full corn,” arise in regular succession. A Christian in his earliest attainments wears a different appearance from what he ever did before; he is not less altered than a grain of wheat when it puts forth “the blade;” he feels himself a sinful, helpless, and undone creature; he cleaves to Christ as a suitable and all-sufficient Saviour, and shews by his whole deportment that he has been quickened from the dead: but still he is prone to entertain self-righteous hopes, and too often yields to unbelieving fears. Hence, though sincere at heart,

^a 1 Cor. xv. 38.

^b Rom. viii. 7.

^c 1 Pet. i. 23. Hence Christ, from whose fulness we receive that grace, is said to live in us, and to be our life. Gal. ii. 20. Col. iii. 4.

^d 1 Cor. xv. 10.

^e 1 Cor. iii. 6, 7.

^f John iv. 14.

his attainments are but small^g. In process of time he shews himself solid and hopeful as "the ear:" his knowledge of self is more deep, and his views of Christ more precious; his dependence on the power and grace of Christ is more simple and firm. Hence, though his conflicts may be more severe, he is more able to sustain them; nor is there any part of his conversation wherein his profiting doth not appear^h. After much experience, both of good and evilⁱ, he becomes like "full corn in the ear." Though his views of himself are more humiliating than ever, he is not discouraged by them; he only takes occasion from them to live more entirely by faith on Christ: there is an evident ripeness in all the fruit that he brings forth. Above all, he lives in a nearer expectation of "the harvest." He sits loose to all the concerns of this present life, and longs for the season when he shall be treasured up in the garner^k.]

3. Inexplicable—

[The most acute philosopher "knoweth not how" the grain vegetates. That it should die before it springs up^l, and then so change its appearance as to put forth the blade, &c. is a mystery that none can explain: thus the operations of grace in the soul of man are also inexplicable. We know not how the Spirit of God acts on the powers of our mind; we discover that he does so by the effects; but *how*, we cannot tell. In this view our Lord compares the Spirit's agency to the wind, the precise point of whose rise or destination we are unable to ascertain^m: nor is the mysteriousness of these changes, which we see in the natural world, ever made a reason for disbelieving them; neither should the difficulty of comprehending some things in a work of grace render us doubtful of its reality.]

This resemblance, already so striking, may be further seen,

II. In the end for which they grow—

The seed grows up in the field in order to the harvest—

[The husbandman in every part of his labour has the harvest in view; he manures, and ploughs, and sows his ground, in hopes of reaping at last. In every successive state of the corn he looks forward to the cropⁿ, and "when the harvest is come," he "immediately puts in the sickle."]

^g Heb. v. 13.

^h To this effect is St. John's description of the young men who are in an intermediate state between children and fathers. 1 John ii. 13, 14.

ⁱ Heb. v. 14.

^k 1 Cor. i. 7. 2 Cor. v. 1—4.

^l 1 Cor. xv. 36.

^m John iii. 8.

ⁿ Jam. v. 7.

Thus also grace springs up in the souls of men to prepare them for glory—

[God, having from the beginning chosen his people to salvation, orders every the minutest incident for the accomplishment of his own purpose^o. All the dispensations of his providence concur for this end; all the operations of his grace are adjusted with the same view. The first infusion of a principle of life into our souls is in order to our eternal happiness. All the ordinances, whereby that life is preserved, are for the same end: for this, the word distils as the dew, and the clouds drop fatness; for this, the very things which seem for a time to retard its growth, are permitted: the gloomy chilling influences of temptation and desertion, are overruled for its final good. When the soul is ripe for glory, “immediately will the sickle be put in:” when we are fully meet for the mansion prepared for us, God will receive us to it. Then will Christ, the great husbandman, rejoice in the fruit of his labours^p; the ministers also, who laboured under him, will rejoice together with him^q; and that promise which our Lord has given us shall be fulfilled^r—.]

This is a rich source of *comfort to ministers*, and of *encouragement to their people*—

[*Ministers*, like the husbandman, are scattering the seeds of God’s words; but, through impatience, are often ready to complain that they have laboured in vain. They forget that the seed lies long under the clods before it vegetates, and that much of their seed may spring up, when they have ceased from their labours: they are often discouraged too by the drooping aspect of their people: they would wish them to grow up to a state of perfection at once, and to attain to ripeness without the changes of succeeding seasons; but it is by such changes that they are brought to maturity^s. Well therefore may ministers prosecute their work with cheerfulness. Leaving events to God, they should follow the direction given them in the word^t— and expect that the promised success shall in due time attend their labours^u—. *People* also, of every description, may receive much encouragement. They often are ready to doubt whether “the root of the matter be indeed in them:” because their progress is not so rapid as they could wish, they are apt to despond. It is right indeed to examine whether we be really endued with life; nor should we rest contented with low degrees of growth. Whatever joy we feel in seeing the blade, we should grieve if it made no progress. Thus we should never

^o 2 Thess. ii. 13, 14. Rom. viii. 28.

^p Isai. liii. 11.

^q 1 Thess. ii. 19, 20. ^r John iv. 36.

^s Rom. v. 3—5.

^t Eccl. xi. 5, 6.

^u Isai. lv. 10, 11.

be satisfied without going on unto perfection. But let us wait with patience for the former and the latter rain. Let us expect a variety of seasons as well in the spiritual as the natural world: let us commit ourselves to God, that he may perfect us in his own way. Thus in due season shall we be fit for the granary of heaven^x; the sickle shall then separate us from all our earthly connexions; and we shall be carried in triumph to our appointed rest.]

^x Job v. 26.

MCCCCXXIV.

THE GRAIN OF MUSTARD-SEED.

Mark iv. 30—32. *And he said, Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it? it is like a grain of mustard-seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth. But when it is sown, it groweth up, and becometh greater than all herbs, and shooteth out great branches; so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it.*

“VERY excellent things are spoken of thee, thou city of God.” There is nothing either in heaven or earth which may not well serve to shadow forth thine excellencies. Our Lord had already illustrated the nature of his kingdom by a great variety of most instructive parables; and now stretches, as it were, his invention, in order to find other similitudes whereby to make it more fully understood. But choosing, as he always did, to bring his illustrations from things most obvious and familiar, he compares his Church and kingdom to a grain of mustard-seed. We shall,

I. Illustrate this comparison—

“The kingdom of God” means, in this as in a multitude of other places, the *visible* kingdom of Christ established in the world, and his *invisible* kingdom erected in the hearts of men. We must illustrate the comparison therefore,

1. In reference to the Church of Christ in the world—

[The mustard-seed is the smallest of all those seeds which grow to any considerable size: and such was the Church of

Christ at its first establishment in the world. It consisted at first of our Lord and his twelve Disciples; and even after our Lord's ascension, their number was only one hundred and twenty. Soon however it spread forth its branches. As the mustard-seed, notwithstanding its smallness, grows up (in the eastern countries) into a tree of some magnitude, so did the Church, notwithstanding its unpromising appearances, extend its limits with astonishing rapidity. In the space of but a very few years, it filled, not Judæa only, but the whole Roman empire. Nor is it yet grown to its full dimensions. It will in the latter days overspread the whole earth. All the kingdoms of the world shall become the kingdoms of the Lord and of his Christ. And as Jews and Gentiles have already taken refuge under its shadow, so shall the people of all nations and languages in God's appointed time^a.]

2. In reference to the grace of God in the heart—

[Grace, when first implanted in the soul, is often very small, shewing itself only in some glimmering views, slight convictions, good desires, faint purposes, and feeble endeavours. But in process of time it grows in every part; it shoots forth its roots into the soul, and becomes stronger in all its branches. The faith which was weak, is confirmed; the hope that was languishing, is made lively and abundant; and the love that was but cold and selfish, displays itself with purity and fervour. And all, who come within the sphere of its influence, receive rest and refreshment from its salutary shade^b. Indeed its full growth cannot be seen in this world. For that glorious sight, we must ascend to heaven, where every tree of righteousness flourishes with unfading beauty, and exhibits in the brightest colours the power and efficacy of the Redeemer's grace.]

Such being the import of the comparison, we shall now proceed to,

II. Improve it—

The parts of our improvement must necessarily have respect to the different views in which the parable has been explained.

We shall draw from it therefore some OBSERVATIONS;

1. For our encouragement respecting the Church at large—

^a This by the spirit of prophecy is beautifully described as passing before the prophet's eyes, and as exciting great astonishment in the church itself. *Isai. xlix. 18—21.*

^b *Hos. xiv. 7.*

[It is to be lamented that infidelity and profaneness have overrun the world; and that this tree which the Lord hath planted, has been so “wasted and devoured by the wild beasts of the field^c.” But still the stock remains, nor shall it ever be rooted up. It shall yet “shoot forth its roots downward and bring forth fruit upward^d.” At various seasons the Church has been contracted within very narrow limits; yet has always been preserved. In the days of Noah and of Abraham, the branches were cut down, and nothing remained but the mere stem; yet it put forth fresh branches, and extended them far and wide. So shall it do yet again, till at last it cover the whole earth. Where there is nothing now but idolatry and every species of wickedness, there shall one day be “holiness to the Lord inscribed upon the very bells of the horses^e.” Let us then water this tree with our prayers and tears. Let us help forward its growth by every means in our power; and look with confidence to that period, when all the nations of the world shall come and sit under its benign shadow.]

2. For our consolation under personal doubts and apprehensions—

[From the smallness of our attainments we are sometimes ready to doubt whether the little seed of grace in our hearts will ever grow up to any use or profit. But there is not a saint in heaven whose grace was not once comparatively weak. All were once “as new-born babes;” nor was it till they had learned many humiliating lessons, that they attained to the age of young men and fathers^f. Thus in the natural world, the largest oak was once an acorn, and the largest mustard-tree a little and contemptible seed. Why then should any despond because of present appearances? Why should not we hope that in process of time our graces shall be strengthened, and our wide-extended branches be filled with fruit? Our God assures us that *he* does “not despise the day of small things^g;” why then should *we*? Let us trust, and not be afraid. Let us look up to heaven for the genial influences of the sun and rain: nor doubt but that God will accomplish the work he has begun^h; and “fulfil in us all the good pleasure of his goodness.”]

^c Ps. lxxx. 8—13.

^d 2 Kings xix. 30.

^e Zech. xiv. 20.

^f 1 John ii. 12, 13.

^g Zech. iv. 10.

^h Phil. i. 6.

MCCCCXXV.

THE GADARENE DEMONIAIC.

Mark v. 16—18. *And they that saw it told them how it befell to him that was possessed with the devil, and also concerning*

the swine. And they began to pray him to depart out of their coasts. And when he was come into the ship, he that had been possessed with the devil, prayed him that he might be with him.

THE miracles of our blessed Lord were certainly intended in the first instance to attest the truth of his divine mission; in which view he himself frequently appeals to them. But they were also intended to shadow forth the benefits which he was to confer on the souls of men. In both these points of view the miracle before us is deserving of the most attentive consideration. True it is that infidels have attempted to reduce this miracle to a mere curing of a man of an epilepsy or falling sickness. But it is evident that devils were expelled from him by the power of our Lord, since it was by *them* that the herd of swine were impelled to rush into the sea. A single *man*, or *two* men (for St. Matthew tells us there were *two*^a, though St. Mark notices only *one*, as being by far the greater monument of our Lord's power,) could not drive *twenty* swine into the sea, and much less *two thousand*, of which number this herd consisted^b: and this destruction of the swine consequent upon the expulsion of the devils from the poor demoniac, shewed how great a deliverance had been effected for him, and how entirely all the hosts of hell were subject to the controul of our blessed Lord.

To enter into these events aright, we should consider them,

I. As they occurred on that occasion—

We notice,

1. The miracle wrought—

[Satan at that time had great power over the bodies of men: and a whole "legion" of devils had at that time occupied that poor unhappy man, whom they endued with a strength wholly supernatural; insomuch that no chains or fetters could confine him^c. But at the command of Jesus they came forth, and left their captive at perfect liberty. Fearing that Jesus

^a Matt. viii. 28.

^b ver. 13.

^c ver. 3—5.

would send them instantly into the abyss of hell, which is, and for ever will be, their appropriate abode, the devils requested permission to enter into the herd of swine; and, having gained permission, they instigated the whole herd to rush down into the sea, where they were all destroyed. Probably the devils hoped by this to incense the owners of the swine against the Lord Jesus; and in this they succeeded altogether according to their wish.]

2. The effects produced—

[The effect *upon the Gadarenes*, to whom the herd belonged, was, to make them all, even the whole city^d, anxious, that our Lord should leave both the place and neighbourhood. One would have supposed indeed that the mercy vouchsafed to the demoniac should rather make the Gadarenes anxious to retain our Lord, that they might obtain similar mercies at his hands: but a concern for their temporal interests swallowed up every other consideration, and united them all in one request, that Jesus “would depart out of their coasts.”

But how different was the effect *upon the man whom Jesus had delivered!* He followed Jesus to the ship, and entreated that he might be permitted to wait upon him as a constant follower and attendant. And, when Jesus, for wise and gracious reasons, forbade that, and told him rather to go home to his friends and relatives, and tell *them* what mercy God had vouchsafed unto him, he went home, and with fidelity and gratitude proclaimed to all around him the benefits he had received from his adorable Benefactor^e.]

But, not to dwell on the events which then took place, I wish you more particularly to view them,

II. As renewed yet daily before our eyes—

Of these things we may be well assured:

1. Satan has still most dreadful power over men—

[He no longer, I apprehend, possesses, as he once did, the *bodies* of men: but he has not one whit less power than he had over their *souls*. See to what an extent the whole race of mankind are subjected to his controul. All men without exception are risen up in rebellion against God. Nor will they submit to any restraint either from reason or conscience. Every one follows his own will and his own way, even to the great injury of all around him, and to the certain destruction of his own soul. Tell men of their fearful responsibility to God, and of the terrors that await them in the

^d Matt. viii 34.

^e ver. 20.

eternal world, and “they make light of all,” and say, like the devils in this poor demoniac, “What have we to do with these things?” or as Pharaoh, “Who is the Lord, that we should serve him? We know not the Lord, neither will we obey his voice.” Not even this poor demoniac acted a more insane part than the generality around us: he wounded and destroyed his body: but these, in all that they do, wound and destroy their immortal souls: so true is that declaration of Solomon, “The heart of the sons of men is full of evil; madness is in their heart, while they live; and after that they go to the dead^f.” And all this is by the instigation of the devil, who is “the God of this world,” and “worketh in all the children of disobedience^g.”]

2. But Jesus still exercises the same sovereign power over him—

[Truly the word of the Lord is yet quick and powerful, nor can all the powers of hell withstand it. We see the effect, as visibly as ever the Gadarenes did, of the word going forth in the ministration of the Gospel. Are there not even here present some who have “passed, as it were, from death unto life^h,” and have “been translated from the power of darkness into the kingdom of God’s dear Sonⁱ?” The Prodigal Son shews us what a change takes place in the soul when once it is enabled to recover itself out of the snare of the devil^k, and to assert its liberty. And if in *him* we behold all the madness of a life passed under the influence of the devil, and all the blessedness of a life consecrated to the service of the Most High, then may we behold the same in many, I trust, amongst ourselves, who have, by the preached Gospel, “been turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God^l.”]

3. But still is there the same enmity against the Saviour in the hearts of ungodly men—

[When the power of divine grace is seen in the deliverance of sinners from the bonds of Satan, we should naturally suppose that all who behold the change should rejoice in it, and desire to become partakers of the same benefits. But the very reverse of this is found true in every place: and, as in the instance before us, an opposition to the Saviour is raised, and persons of every description unite in a desire to expel him from their coasts. In *this*, Herod and Pontius Pilate will unite^m: in *this* will both Jews and Gentiles concurⁿ: in *this*

^f Eccl. ix. 3.

^g 2 Cor. iv. 4. Eph. ii. 2.

^h 1 John iii. 14.

ⁱ Col. i. 13.

^k 2 Tim. ii. 26.

^l Acts xxvi. 18.

^m Luke xxiii. 12.

ⁿ Acts iv. 27.

will “devout women” be found in league with “lewd fellows of the baser sort^o,” the desire of all ranks and orders of ungodly men are in perfect harmony on this subject; they all with one voice exclaim, “Depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of thy ways^p.”]

4. Still however on the part of those who have experienced his saving benefits is there the same desire to glorify his name—

[To commune with the Saviour, to enjoy his presence, to fulfil his will, and to obtain richer communications of his grace, are the leading desires of all who have been delivered by him from the power of the devil. Whatever be their situation in life, they will be “as lights in a dark world^q,” and will so “make their light to shine before men, that all who behold them shall glorify the name of Jesus^r.” They feel themselves bound to stand up as witnesses for him, that he is that “stronger man, who alone can bind the strong man armed^s,” and deliver from his bonds the vassals whom “he had led captive at his will.” From a sense of gratitude to his heavenly Benefactor, he will, like this liberated maniac, commend him to all around him, saying with the Psalmist, “Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will tell you what he hath done for my soul^t.”]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who have never yet been dispossessed of the devil—

[It is humiliating to reflect on the state of our fallen world, of which “Satan is the god,” and we all without exception are his subjects. To all who live in sin of any kind it may be said, “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye do^u.” “What have we to do with thee?” was the one voice of all the devils in the man that was possessed by them: and all of them cried, “Torment us not.” And is not a similar apprehension expressed by men at this day, when the Lord Jesus Christ is, as it were, introduced amongst them, “Speak not to us of *him*; do not make us melancholy?” Does not the whole tenour of men’s lives shew, “whose they are, and whom they serve?” It is not necessary that men should rush headlong into all manner of iniquity. Sin, whether of a more heinous or more specious kind, equally shews under whose influence they live^x, and that they need to

^o Acts xiii. 50. xvi. 39. and xvii. 5.

^p Job xxi. 14.

^q Matt. v. 14. Phil. ii. 15.

^r Matt. v. 16.

^s Luke xi. 22.

^t ver. 20. with Ps. lxvi. 16.

^u John viii. 42.

^x 1 John iii. 8, 10.

“be turned from idols to serve the living God.” Satisfy not then yourselves, my brethren, with some good feelings and some general acknowledgments. The devils acknowledged Jesus as the “Son of the living God; and they deprecated his wrath; and yet were they devils still. You must go much further than this if you would be partakers of Christ’s kingdom and glory. You must be made “new creatures in Christ Jesus,” and must evince the reality of this change by a corresponding and visible deportment.]

2. Those who have been made monuments of Christ’s power and grace—

[See what unbounded mercy has been vouchsafed unto you. See in the fate of that entire herd of swine what is the final destiny of all the vassals of sin and Satan. O bless your God for his distinguishing grace. And now, whilst you confess your obligations, arise to the duties imposed upon you. To that liberated man the Lord Jesus said, “Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee.” And this he says to every one of you. Not that you are to do this in a way of boasting and self-complacency: God forbid: but you must do it in order to commend the Saviour to all around you, and, if possible, to bring them also to a participation of his saving benefits. And be attentive also to the whole of your life and conversation, that you may “adorn the doctrine” which you profess, and constrain all to glorify Him who has done such great things for you.]

MCCCCXXVI.

THE WOMAN WITH A BLOODY FLUX HEALED.

Mark v. 25—29. *A certain woman which had an issue of blood twelve years, and had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse, when she had heard of Jesus, came in the press behind, and touched his garment. For she said, If I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole. And straightway the fountain of her blood was dried up; and she felt in her body that she was healed of that plague.*

THE miracles of our Lord afford much useful instruction. They were not perhaps always intended as types; but they afford a just occasion for spiritual observations.

To improve the miracle now before us, we observe,

I. Sin has introduced many lamentable evils into the world—

[Sickness and pain and death are the effects of sin. If our first parents had not sinned, these things had never existed. The infirmities of the weaker sex are especially noticed in this view^a. Deplorable was the condition of the woman mentioned in the text: but incomparably worse effects have proceeded from sin: our souls are altogether diseased in every part. The prophet's description of the Jews is applicable to us^b. Our own confession is but too just a picture of our state^c; and, if we should die in this state, we must surely perish^d.]

II. We are prone to rest in carnal methods of removing them—

[The woman had employed many physicians, and had spent her substance on them without any benefit. We blame her not for using all possible means of relief: but she had looked no higher than to the creature for help. This conduct incensed the Lord against good King Asa^e; and in every age it provokes the eyes of his glory. In spiritual things we generally act the same part. Under slight convictions of sin we rest in purposes of amendment. If guilt lie heavy on our souls, we flee to duties, and hope by them to compensate for past neglects^f. Not but that it is right to use the means of salvation: but we should look through the means to the Saviour, and expect mercy, not for our diligence, but for his name's sake^g. Unless we do this our labour will end in disappointment.]

III. However desperate our disorders be, the Lord Jesus is able to heal them—

[The woman's disease had baffled all the art of medicine; but she hoped to find relief from the Lord Jesus. Nor was she disappointed in her application to him: there went virtue out of him and healed her instantly. The same power will he exercise over the diseases of the soul. The most heinous sins may be purged away by his blood; the most inveterate lusts may be subdued by his Spirit^h. A whole cloud of witnesses have testified of this truthⁱ: nor are there wanting many living monuments of his power and grace.]

IV. The more we honour Jesus by faith, the more will he bless and honour us—

^a Gen. iii. 16. ^b Isai. i. 5, 6. ^c "There is no health in us."

^d 1 Cor. vi. 9. ^e 2 Chron. xvi. 12. ^f Mic. vi. 6, 7.

^g Rom. ix. 31, 32. ^h 1 Cor. vi. 11.

ⁱ Manasseh, David, Solomon, Paul, &c. See 1 Tim. i. 16.

[Greatly did this diseased person honour Jesus by her faith. She had heard of his unbounded power and benevolence towards others: she trusted that he would exercise them towards herself. Nor did she at all stagger through unbelief. Jesus therefore determined to bless and honour her. His inquiries were made, not for his own information, but to bring her into notice, and to propose her as a pattern for the encouragement of others. He not only conveyed, but expressly confirmed, her cure, and dismissed her with the endearing appellation of “daughter.” Thus will he testify his love to all who rely upon him. How gloriously did he reward the confidence of the Hebrew Youths^k! Nor shall any put their trust in him in vain. Their sins, however numerous, shall surely be forgiven^l: their difficulties, however great, shall surely be overcome^m.]

ADDRESS—

1. To those who are unconcerned about their spiritual maladies—

[We all are sensible that we are sinful creatures, and profess an intention to seek forgiveness: yet for the most part we defer this necessary work. If our bodies were disordered, we should apply to the physician; we should even spend our substance in procuring his aid, and this, with only an uncertain hope of obtaining relief. But we account the smallest labour too much for our souls: we will not apply in earnest to our Almighty Physician, notwithstanding we could not fail of success in our application, and should be sure to obtain healing “without money and without price.” What strange infatuation possesses impenitent sinners! What extreme folly is it to prefer the transient welfare of a perishable body, before the eternal welfare of an immortal soul! Let the conduct of this woman put such persons to shame, and let them instantly avail themselves of the Saviour’s presence.]

2. To those who desire to have their disorders healed—

[Man is ever prone to seek help in the creature *first*. The Jews of old did this to their own confusionⁿ: and God has declared, that all who do so shall fail of success^o. Let us then be convinced that the sinner’s help is in God alone, and that all others are “physicians of no value.” Let us never question the power or willingness of Christ to save. Let us *make our way to him through all difficulties and obstructions*. Let us

^k Dan. iii. 17, 25, 27.

^l Matt. xii. 31.

^m Mark xi. 22, 23.

ⁿ Hos. v. 13.

^o Jer. xvii. 5, 6.

stretch out our hands with humble boldness and confidence, nor doubt but that virtue shall proceed from him to heal our souls.]

MCCCCXXVII.

PREVALENCE OF UNBELIEF.

Mark vi. 6. *And he marvelled because of their unbelief.*

ONE would suppose, that those who had the fullest opportunity of knowing the Lord Jesus from his earliest infancy, would have been the first to embrace his salvation, when once it was openly proclaimed to them. But the very reverse of this was the fact. The circumstance of their knowing his family connexions was a ground of offence to them; so that they were more averse to receive him, than others were who had never possessed these advantages. We are not to suppose that this excited real surprise in the bosom of our Saviour; because he knew, from the beginning, that “a Prophet has no honour in his own country. But, as the inspired writers always speak of him as if he had been affected as other men, we are told in my text, “He marvelled because of their unbelief.”

A similar effect is generally produced wherever Christ is preached. His Gospel is but too generally despised by those to whom it is more immediately sent; and it is more sought and valued by those who are somewhat remote from the sphere of its stated ministration. In fact, there are but few, in any place, who embrace it with their whole hearts. In proof of this, I will shew you,

I. What unbelief prevails amongst us—

I grant, that if the name of Christianity were sufficient, we all are Christians. But the slightest observation of what is passing either around us or within us, is sufficient to convince us,

1. How few regard the Lord Jesus Christ with the veneration he deserves—

[As to the bowing of the head or knee at the mention of his name, many will do *that*, who never bow their hearts to his

will, or yield obedience to his commands. If from our inmost souls we regarded him as “Emmanuel, God with us,” how should we fear before him; admiring his person, adoring his love, and magnifying his grace! See how the Cherubim before the throne conduct themselves, whilst incessantly they proclaim his praise^a: so would it be with us in our daily walk before him, if our faith were such as it ought to be: we should veil our faces as unworthy to behold him; and our feet, as unworthy to serve him; whilst we should yet strive to serve him with all our faculties, both of soul and body.]

2. How few look to him aright for the communication of his saving benefits!

[We see how diseased persons pressed around him in the days of his flesh; and were let down through the roofs of their houses, when no other way of access to him was open to them. But where do we find persons thus earnest in their approaches to him in their secret chambers? The diseases of our souls can be healed by him alone: yet, if we look at our prayers that are offered to him day and night, who has not reason to blush and be ashamed? — — — And whence is this, but from our unbelief, which keeps us from feeling either our need of his mercy, or of his willingness to bestow it.]

3. How few surrender up themselves to him as his devoted servants!

[Behold how the Apostles left their nets, and Matthew the receipt of custom, to attend upon their Lord! So, *in heart and spirit*, will all his believing people forsake all for him^b. But say, Whether, this be indeed the habit of your lives? Look back to your early days; and trace your conduct up, through successive years, to the present moment, and then declare, whether you have ever risen thus superior to earthly things, and devoted yourselves unreservedly to your Lord and Saviour! This is the proper office and effect of faith^c: and the total want of this fruit argues but too plainly the want of the root from which alone it can proceed.]

This state of things may well excite our wonder; as will appear, whilst I shew,

II. What reason there is to marvel at it—

Consider, I pray you,

1. With what abundant evidence Christ is set forth amongst you—

^a Isai. vi. 1—3. with John xii. 41.

^b Luke xiv. 33.

^c 1 John v. 4.

[At Nazareth, he appeared as a poor man, of a poor family, in circumstances of extreme want, not having so much as a place where to lay his head. And from his hearers there his future history was veiled, as was also the entire nature of his divine mission. Yet our Lord marvelled at their unbelief. But to you the entire nature of his dispensation is made manifest; and the glory of God, as displayed in it, has been set before your eyes. You see him coming down from heaven, to obey the law which you have broken, and to endure the curse which you have merited; and then rising from the dead, and ascending to heaven, to perfect the work for you. You have beheld the meridian blaze, as it were, of that light, of which *they* saw but the early dawn. Nay, more; you have seen “the glory of all the Divine perfections concentrated in him, and shining forth in his face^d.” If, then, there was cause for marvel at *their* unbelief, what must there be at *yours*? — — —]

2. With what confidence you profess yourselves to be his—

[You would account it a grievous insult, if your right to call yourselves Christians were questioned. Yet, if you will forgive me, I would ask, What are the great mass of you better than baptized heathens? You have been baptized in the name of Christ, it is true; as Simon Magus also was: but, what was he changed by his baptism; or, what are you? What evidence have you that you are “born of the Spirit,” and “made new creatures in Christ Jesus?” And if, in the want of all proof of conversion, you maintain your title to heaven, say whether you be not opposing every declaration of God in his word, and whether there be not reason to marvel at your unbelief?]

3. What important interests you have at stake—

[On your believing in Christ your eternal happiness depends. This, all who receive the Gospel most cordially acknowledge. How comes it, then, that you never take the trouble to examine your state before God, and to try the sincerity of your faith? One would suppose that the thought of eternal happiness in heaven, or of eternal misery in hell, should be sufficient to awaken you to some consideration: but, since nothing of this kind can influence you, we may well marvel at your unbelief — — —]

Know, then,

1. That the Lord Jesus Christ at this very instant marvels at you—

^d 2 Cor. iv. 6.

[As sure as he ever marvelled at the Nazarenes in the days of his flesh, so does he now at you. ‘These are the persons for whom I went down from heaven, and for whom I lived and died; yea, and for whose salvation I am yet anxious; as I have shewn, by sending to them the invitations of my word, and the offers of my grace. How strange it is that they should yet remain insensible of all this love! — — — For the Nazarenes there is some excuse; but for *these*, none at all — — — “O that they were wise, and would consider their latter end!” O that they would turn unto me in this “their day of grace, in this the day of their salvation!”’]

2. That you will, ere long, marvel at yourselves—

[How strange will it appear to you, the very instant you go hence, that you could ever treat so lightly these overtures of grace! But, alas! the time for remedying that error will be past. If you be in heaven, methinks you would be filled with indignation against yourselves, if indignation could ever enter those mansions of bliss: but, if you be in hell, there will be scope in abundance for this painful feeling; since a retrospect upon the mercies you have abused, and the opportunities you have lost, will constitute the bitterest ingredient of your cup to all eternity. May God so operate on your minds by his grace, that you may now turn to the Lord Jesus with your whole hearts, and become marvellous and stupendous monuments of his mercy for ever and ever!]

MCCCCXXVIII.

CHRISTIAN GRATITUDE DELINEATED.

Mark vi. 51, 52. *And he went up unto them into the ship; and the wind ceased: and they were sore amazed in themselves beyond measure, and wondered. For they considered not the miracle of the loaves: for their heart was hardened.*

OUR blessed Lord, after feeding five thousand men, besides women and children, with five loaves and two small fishes, sent his Disciples over the Lake of Gennesaret, whilst he dismissed the people: and then he went up into a mountain to pray. The Disciples laboured, for many hours, to reach the place of their destination; but were unable, on account of the violence of the wind. After nine or ten hours' toil, they were still far from land (notwithstanding the lake was not above five or six miles

broad;) and, behold, they see one walking upon the water, whom they supposed to be a spirit; and, filled with terror at such an extraordinary spectacle, they cried out. Our blessed Lord, however, drew nigh to them, and, in the most condescending manner, dispelled their fears, and went up to them into the vessel: and instantly the wind ceased; and they were transported in their boat, by miracle, to the very place where they had been enjoined to land. On many other occasions they were “amazed^a,” and “astonished with great astonishment^b,” yea, and beyond measure “astonished^c :” but, on the present occasion, it is said they were “sore amazed within themselves beyond measure, and wondered.”

Now, we shall find it by no means an unprofitable subject for our consideration, if I shew you,

I. What we are to think of the astonishment here expressed—

I suppose that there are few amongst us who would not highly approve of it, as exactly suited to the occasion. For our Lord to come to them walking upon the sea, and in an instant to still the winds and waves, and to transport the ship, without any further effort on their part, to the desired haven, was beyond measure wonderful; and therefore we should be ready to commend the sensibility which they manifested, and the amazement which they expressed. But I am constrained to say, that their feelings on the occasion were altogether wrong; and that their astonishment, instead of being commendable, was highly criminal; since it was nothing but a compound of ignorance, and forgetfulness, and obduracy.

1. Of ignorance—

[They knew not who our Saviour was: they supposed him to be a mere man. Had they known him to be *the God of heaven and earth*, they would no more have wondered at his walking on the sea, or stilling the winds, than they would wonder at *a man* walking on dry land, and stopping a wheel which he himself had set in motion. He had indeed

^a Mark ii. 12.

^b Mark v. 42.

^c Mark vii. 37.

proclaimed himself to be God manifested in the flesh; and, by innumerable miracles, wrought in his own name and by his own power, he had proved himself to be so: but they believed him not, and could not conceive of him in his true and proper character as their incarnate God: and to this ignorance and unbelief our Lord traces the very feelings which they had shewn on a similar occasion: "How is it that ye have *no faith?* And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, *What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him^d?*" They "thought him to be only such an one as themselves^e;" and to *that* must be traced the excess of wonder which they expressed on this most interesting occasion.]

2. Of forgetfulness—

[Within the space of twelve hours from that time, they had seen his miracle of the loaves, in which they themselves had been the instruments of dispensing to five thousand men a few loaves and fishes. They themselves had seen the bread increasing in their own hands before their eyes, whilst they were in the very act of distributing it to the people; and, after having fed to the full the whole multitude, they had taken up in fragments probably ten or a dozen times more in quantity than there was at the beginning^f. Now, had they kept this in mind, they could never have been so surprised at his walking on the sea, or his stilling of the winds; which were, in fact, no greater miracles than that which they had so recently witnessed, and in which they themselves had borne such a distinguished part. Hence the Evangelist blames them for their conduct, and ascribes to their forgetfulness of the one miracle their astonishment at the other: "they were sore amazed, and wondered; *for they considered not the miracle of the loaves.*"]

3. Of obduracy—

[They had not been duly impressed with the miracle of the loaves. If they had felt as became them on *that* occasion, they would never have been filled with such overpowering astonishment on *this*. But they were in an insensible and obdurate state: and therefore the Evangelist says, "they wondered; *for their heart was hardened.*" In like manner, when, in the next chapter, our Lord bade them to "beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the leaven of Herod," and they understood him as giving directions only respecting bread, he said to them, "Have ye your *heart yet hardened?*" and then, calling to their remembrance two different seasons when he had fed immense multitudes with a few loaves, he repeated with anger that just reproof, "How is it that ye do not understand^g?"

^d Mark iv. 40, 41.

^e Ps. l. 21.

^f ver. 41—44.

^g Mark viii. 14—21.

Thus, you perceive, if we analyze the Apostles' feelings, instead of admiring them as suited to the occasion, we shall condemn them as altogether unworthy of their Christian character.]

For the regulation of our own conduct, let us learn from their astonishment,

II. What lessons it should teach us—

This is a subject which I consider as of very great importance to the Church of God. Were it a mere arbitrary construction of mine, it might be supposed that I carried the matter too far, and dealt too harshly with the Apostles in my censures of them. But the censure is passed by God himself: and by it he instructs us,

1. What is the proper measure of our expectations—

[We are apt, in our expectations from God, to take into consideration the difficulties that are to be surmounted, and our unworthiness of the blessing which we implore at his hands: and from these two considerations we are apt to doubt his effectual interposition in our behalf. But, instead of giving weight to such considerations as those, we ought rather to reflect on what God has done; and to make his past mercies the standard by which to regulate our future expectations. I need *his power*. And what proof has he given of its sufficiency for *me*? He has created the universe, and by one act of his power called it into existence. Then I take it as an unquestionable truth, that nothing is impossible with him, and that I can be in no state whatever in which he cannot afford me effectual relief^h. I need also *his grace*. And what has he done that will give me any just idea of his grace? He has given his only dear Son out of his bosom, to assume my nature, and bear my sins, and, by the sacrifice of himself to restore me to his favour. Shall I then limit the extent of his grace to me in other matters? The Apostle says, “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered *him* up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all thingsⁱ?” This argument is sound and conclusive; and precisely such as the Disciples should have used on the occasion before us: ‘We have seen within these few hours the stupendous miracle of the loaves; and, having seen *that*, we shall wonder at no other exercise of his power or grace that he shall be pleased to vouchsafe unto

^h Isai. xl. 28, 29.

ⁱ Rom. viii. 32.

us; and least of all, when we consider that the loaves were multiplied for multitudes who had flocked to him from mere curiosity, shall we be astonished at any thing which he may do for *us*, his stated followers, and his chosen Disciples. Yes, brethren, we are to bear in mind what God has done, and from thence to conclude what he will do; and never to entertain a doubt but that his grace, in every possible point of view, whether as acting in us or exercised towards us, shall be sufficient for us.]

2. What is the proper expression of our gratitude—

[If God have shewn mercy to us of any kind, either in a way of providence or of grace, we are not to be wrapt in wonder, as though he had exceeded all that his proper character had taught us to expect. *This* would be a very unbecoming way of shewing our gratitude. Suppose a man of known piety and wealth were to relieve a poor family by bestowing on them a few shillings; and all the neighbours who heard of it were to be astonished beyond measure at this act of kindness; would their astonishment reflect any honour on the person so greatly lauded? Would it not shew, either that the persons did not know his character, or that, at least, they were ignorant of what true piety requires? If they knew the man, instead of being filled with wonder at this exercise of his benevolence, they would only say, He has acted *like himself*, and in a manner worthy of the high character he sustains. Thus, whatever we may receive from God, we must not be filled with wonder; but regard his mercies as a proof and evidence that He is what he has described himself to be, sovereign in the objects of his choice, and unbounded in the communications of his love. In *admiration* of his goodness we may abound as much as we will: indeed it is not possible to have our souls too deeply penetrated with admiring and adoring thoughts of God: the more we resemble the heavenly hosts in this respect, the better: they, both saints and angels, are all prostrate upon their faces before the throne of God, in profoundest adoration: and such should be our posture at the throne of grace, every day, and all the day long. In holy activity, too, there can be no excess: we may serve God with every faculty we possess, whether of body or soul. It is *wonder* only that must be excluded; because *that* is no better than a compound of ignorance, forgetfulness, and obduracy, and is therefore altogether unsuitable to express our unbounded obligations to Almighty God.]

APPLICATION—

1. Are any of you involved in trouble and perplexity? See in whom you have help—

[You, when proceeding in the path of duty, may meet with storms and tempests, even as the Apostles did, when prosecuting

their appointed course; and you may labour both long and painfully in vain. But is therefore your condition hopeless? No: there is One who is both able and willing to save you, if only you call on him. He may appear to be far off: but he is near at hand, though you know him not; and the hour of your extremity shall be the time of his effectual interposition: yes, "He that shall come, will come, and will not tarry." But perhaps your difficulties appear insurmountable. They may be so to you; but "with *Him* all things are possible:" at His command the winds and waves shall be still; and all your troubles shall vanish in an instant. Be assured, that what he did for his Disciples of old, he will do for you at this day; and if only you commit your souls to him, you shall speedily be at the haven where you would be.]

2. Have any of you been delivered from trouble? Give to the Lord Jesus all the glory—

[You see how vain your own labours are; and that you may toil during your whole life in vain, if he come not to your aid. What could any of you have done to remove guilt from your consciences, or to mortify sin, and transform yourselves into the Divine image? To all eternity you would have laboured in vain to effect any one of these things. But Jesus, by his all-atoning blood, has expiated your guilt; and, by sprinkling that blood upon your consciences, has brought peace into your souls; and, by his all-powerful grace, has enabled you to overcome your spiritual enemies, and to fulfil the will of God. And, if it were allowed to us to *wonder*, you might well be *amazed* at what he has wrought for you. But in what he has done, he has only fulfilled his own office, and displayed his own proper character, as a Saviour. Give him, then, the glory of all that he has done; and "be his witnesses" to an ungodly world, that "he is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him."]

MCCCCXXIX.

THE MEANS OF SPIRITUAL DEFILEMENT.

Mark vii. 14—16. *And when he had called all the people unto him, he said unto them, Hearken unto me every one of you, and understand: there is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him: but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man. If any man have ears to hear, let him hear.*

IT is by no means uncommon to see an excessive attachment to human institutions in those who have

very little regard for the laws of God. Persons of this description are ever eager to censure a trifling deviation from some foolish custom, while they allow themselves in a constant violation of the most important duties. They strain at a gnat and swallow a camel. Such were the Pharisees of old: they had condemned our Lord's Disciples for not complying with their traditions; our Lord therefore first exposed their hypocrisy, and then vindicated his followers by a very apposite parable—

In illustration of the parable we shall endeavour to shew,

I. What it is which defiles the soul—

Our Lord observes, that “whatsoever entereth into a man cannot defile him:” not but that a man is defiled by drunkenness and excess; but it is the disposition which is indulged, and not the mere act of eating or drinking that constitutes that defilement. As the heart is the seat of spiritual defilement, so that alone which proceeds from it or resides in it, can render man unclean in the sight of God. The things therefore which defile a man are,

Evil words—

[These proceed out of the abundance of the heart; and alas! what “filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness” do they betray! What a want of reverence for the Deity is discovered by *profane* words! Well does God say, that “He will not hold those guiltless” who utter them. *Angry and passionate* expressions manifest a murderous rancour in the heart^a; and justly subject those who use them to the punishment of hell-fire^b. *Lying* is held in abhorrence even by those who are most addicted to the practice of it: nor can persons who give way to it have any portion in the kingdom of heaven^c. Who would augur well of that heart, which gives vent to *slander and calumny*? or who does not approve the sentence of excision, which David had decreed against those who should be notoriously addicted to such habits^d? Pleasing as *flattery* is to our vain minds, every one is disgusted with it except when it bears the semblance of truth; nor will God fail to punish those who so basely prostitute the powers of speech^e. Even

^a 1 John iii. 15.

^b Matt. v. 22.

^c Rev. xxii. 15.

^d Ps. ci. 5.

^e Ps. xii. 3.

an *idle* word is odious in the sight of God; and a strict account of it shall be rendered in the day of judgment^f.]

Evil dispositions—

[There is not any thing more sordid and grovelling than a *worldly and covetous* disposition. The object of its desire is always stigmatized by the name of "*filthy lucre*." As for *envy*, it is justly represented as rottenness in the bones^g. It even operates as a disorder to reduce our bodily frame, at the same time that it wastes and destroys the soul. *Censoriousness* is nearly allied to this; and no less indicates a narrow, selfish, and base mind. What stronger symptom of internal depravity can there be than a *peevish, discontented, murmuring* spirit? Even Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of those who should indulge such a temper, that God would execute his judgments upon them^h. *Levity* is less hateful indeed; but it argues an unmindfulness of the Divine presence, and a state of soul very unbecoming those who are on the brink and precipice of eternity. Nor is *sloth* by any means a small indication of a corrupt heart: it enervates all our powers, and unfits us for the service either of God or man. In what light our Lord regards this disposition we clearly see by that address of his, "Thou wicked and slothful servant:" "Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness."]

Evil thoughts—

[The very "thoughts of our hearts are all naked and open before God," and he regards them as infallible marks of the state of our souls. Those thoughts indeed which are rejected instantly with indignation, do not leave any stain upon the soul; but those which are in the least degree harboured and indulged, most assuredly defile us. We are told that "the very thought of foolishness is sinⁱ." And Simon Magus was exhorted to "pray that the thought of his heart might be forgiven him^k." Indeed it is but a small part of the wickedness of the heart that discovers itself by words and actions. All sin is first conceived in the imagination; and much lies buried there for want of an opportunity to break forth. Who can number the *proud*, the *impure*, the *uncharitable*, the *revengeful*, the *unbelieving*, and the "*vain* thoughts that often lodge in the soul?" or who can estimate the guilt which we contract by means of them? It is worthy of remark, that these are the very things whereby our Lord himself says that the heart is defiled^l. And these are the things which, when brought

^f Matt. xii. 36.

^g Prov. xiv. 30.

^h Jude, ver. 14—16.

ⁱ Prov. xxiv. 9.

^k Acts viii. 22.

^l ver. 21—23.

to maturity, fill the world with adulteries, murders, and all manner of abominations^m.]

The very peculiar manner in which this truth is delivered by our Lord, leads us to shew,

II. The importance of understanding and knowing this distinction—

Our Lord “called all the people unto him;” he addressed them not only collectively, but, as it were, individually, “every one.” He repeated his exhortation, “Hearken, and understand;” and lastly, he confirmed it with a very emphatical admonition, “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.” Now the reason of all this solemnity will appear, if we consider, that on the clear knowledge of this truth depends our knowledge of every thing that is important in religion. Without it we cannot know,

1. The extent of our own depravity—

[While we think that our defilement arises principally from outward actions, we shall entertain a good opinion of ourselves. If we have been kept from flagrant transgressions, we shall be, like Paul in his unconverted state, “alive without the law.” But if the spirituality of the commandment, and our deviations from the line of duty, be made to appear to us, we like him shall “die,” that is, we shall see ourselves dead in trespasses and sinsⁿ. Knowing the depravity of our own hearts, we shall be willing to humble ourselves before God as undone sinners; we shall cry like Job, “Behold, I am vile; I repent, and abhor myself in dust and ashes. Now till we be thus brought to lothe ourselves, we have no genuine repentance. We must therefore learn wherein spiritual defilement consists, if ever we would have the guilt of it removed from our souls; for, except we repent, we must perish.]

2. The impossibility of cleansing ourselves—

[The lopping off a few branches of sin is no more than what an unregenerate person may do. While therefore he supposes that all his defilement consists in those, he will be depending on his own strength. But our disorder is far beyond any remedy of our own prescription: “The whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint:” “Every imagination of the thoughts of our hearts has been only evil continually.” We must, therefore, become entire new creatures: “Old things

^m Jam. iv. 1.

ⁿ Rom. vii. 9.

must pass away, and all things must become new." And is such a change within the power of unassisted man to effect? Let any one strive to put away every evil disposition, and to suppress with indignation every rising thought of sin; let him plant the contrary dispositions in his heart, and cherish with delight the thoughts that are of a contrary tendency; he may as well attempt to build a world as to do this in his own strength^o. Yet this must be done. We do not say that a person must be absolutely perfect here; but he must pant after perfection, and lothe himself for every remaining imperfection, even of thought. Surely this must be the work of that Almighty Agent who spake the universe into existence, and brought order and beauty out of the shapeless chaos^p. And when we know the depth of our depravity, then and then only, shall we be willing to seek help from Him on whom it is laid.]

3. The suitableness and excellency of the Gospel salvation—

[While ignorant of our own depravity, we are unaffected with the tidings of the Gospel. Others may appear to need a fountain; but we do not, because we have very little pollution: others may need a new heart; but we have a very good one by nature. Thus the offers of the Gospel are of no value in our eyes; but when we know the depth of our corruptions, we are thankful to hear of a fountain opened for sin; and the promise of a new heart is precious to our souls^q. The Gospel *then* appears exactly suited to our necessities, and "every thing is accounted as dung and dross for the excellency of the knowledge of it."]

APPLICATION—

1. To those who lay a stress on formal services—

[We mean not to depreciate an outward conformity to religion; but where there is no more than that, the soul is in a lost and perishing condition. *That* is only like "the painting of a sepulchre which is full of rottenness and all uncleanness." Remember then, ye must "lay the axe to the root of the tree." "Ye must be born again." This is the solemn and repeated declaration of Christ himself, "Ye must be born of the Spirit, or ye can never enter into the kingdom of God." Hearken then, and understand this solemn admonition: let every one of you apply it to himself. Cry with David, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." "If any man hath ears to hear, let him hear."]

^o Jer. xiii. 23.

^p Eph. i. 19, 20. and ii. 10.

^q Ezek. xxxvi. 25—27.

2. To those who have begun to experience vital and spiritual religion—

[It is an unspeakable blessing to know any thing of your own hearts; nor can you ever be sufficiently thankful to Him who has discovered to you “the mystery of iniquity” within you: but what earnest heed ought you to take lest you be drawn again under the power of your corruptions! You still carry about with you “a body of sin and death:” “The flesh lusteth still against the Spirit, as well as the Spirit against the flesh.” Let it then be your daily endeavour to “crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts.” Be daily “putting off the old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be putting on the new man,” &c. It is a solemn admonition which God has given you, “If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy.” “Ye are now the temple of the Holy Ghost;” O guard against every thought or desire that may grieve your Divine guest. You must resist the first risings of inclination: a desire indulged will blind the eyes, and harden the heart, and bring in with it a host of sins. Above all, commit yourselves to that Almighty Saviour, who has promised to preserve you blameless unto his heavenly kingdom. So shall you be washed in his blood from every fresh contracted stain, and be rendered “meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.”]

MCCCCXXX.

THE DEAF AND DUMB MAN HEALED.

Mark vii. 32—36. *And they bring unto him one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech; and they beseech him to put his hand upon him. And he took him aside from the multitude, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spit, and touched his tongue; and looking up to heaven, he sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened. And straightway his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain; and he charged them that they should tell no man.*

THE astonishing frequency of our Lord's miracles renders them the less noticed; and we are ready to suppose that, after a few of them have been considered, the rest will afford us nothing new. But every distinct miracle was attended with some peculiar circumstances, and ought to excite our admiration as

much as if it had been the only one recorded. To improve that which is now before us, we may consider,

I. The manner in which it was wrought—

Many instructive lessons may be learned from an attentive survey of our Lord's conduct in every part of his life. His manner of performing this miracle was peculiarly worthy of notice. It was,

Humble—

[He “took the man aside from the multitude” that surrounded him: not that he was afraid of having his miracles inspected and scrutinized: the greater part of them were wrought publicly before all: but on some occasions he sought rather to conceal his works. He wished not to excite the envy of the priests, or the jealousy of the rulers: he laboured also to avoid all appearance of ostentation: he would shew us by his example how our acts of beneficence should be performed^a, and that we should never be actuated by the love of man's applause^b. Hence he so strictly “charged the people” not to divulge this miracle. He also “looked up to heaven” in acknowledgment of his Father's concurrence. Not but that he had in himself all power to do whatsoever he willed^c: but, as Mediator, he bore his commission from his heavenly Father, and therefore directed the eyes of men to HIM as the fountain of all good. Thus did he teach us to look up to heaven for aid, even in those things for which we might suppose ourselves to be most sufficient, and to consult in every thing, not our own glory, but the glory of God.]

Compassionate—

[Touched with pity toward the object before him, “he sighed.” He could not view even the present miseries introduced by sin, without deep commiseration. Thus he shewed how fit he was to be our great high priest^d, and how *we* ought to feel for others, and to bear their burthens^e. We should never behold the bodily infirmities of others without longing to relieve them: nor, without gratitude to God for the continued use of our own faculties.]

Sovereign—

[Though he looked up to heaven, he wrought the miracle by his own power. He had only to issue the command, Be opened. He who once said, Let there be light, and there was light, needed only to express his will in order to be obeyed.

^a Matt. vi. 3.

^b John v. 41.

^c John v. 21.

^d Heb. iv. 15.

^e Gal. vi. 2.

Instantly the man received the perfect use of his faculties; and, though enjoined silence, became an active instrument of spreading his Benefactor's praise.]

Mysterious—

[Our Lord was pleased to put his finger into the man's ears, and to touch his tongue with his finger, which he had previously moistened with his own spittle^f. What was the precise intention of these means we cannot determine. Certain it is, that they had no necessary connexion with the restoration of the man's faculties: but they are not without their use as they respect *us*. They shew that there are no means, how weak soever in themselves, and inadequate to the end proposed, which he may not make use of for his own glory, and that it becomes us to submit to any means whereby he may be pleased to convey his benefits.]

But, besides more minute considerations, there are others which arise from a more general view of the miracle:

II. The improvement we should make of it—

All the miracles were intended to confirm the doctrine delivered by our Lord—

We may very properly therefore CONSIDER this as,

1. A proof of his mission—

[It had long been foretold that the Messiah should work miracles. The restoring of men to the use of their faculties was among the number of the works which were to be performed by him^g. Here then the prophecy received a *literal* accomplishment; nor could prejudice itself find any just reason for questioning any longer our Lord's Messiahship. We indeed enjoy such abundant light and evidence that we need not the support of any single miracle: but, as all the miracles collectively, so should each individually, assure us beyond a doubt, that Jesus is the Christ.]

^f The Author here follows the sense given to this passage by commentators: but he apprehends there was far more intended than is generally supposed. Our Lord, ἔβαλε τοὺς δακτύλους αὐτοῦ εἰς τὰ ὄρα (a very strong expression; and a very significant act!) καὶ πτύσας, spitting on the ground, ἤψατο. It is not said, that he whet his finger with his spittle, but only that he spat. Now *he is very averse to fanciful interpretations*: but he would suggest, that *possibly* our Lord might intend to intimate, that the ears must be opened by the conveyance of instruction, and the tongue be loosened by the casting away of the evil that is within us. He mentions this, however, with great diffidence.

^g Isai. xxxv. 5, 6.

2. A specimen of his work—

[Jesus had a much greater work than that of healing bodily disorders, He is the great physician whose office it is to heal men's souls. The miracles which he wrought in the days of his flesh were only as shadows of those which he had undertaken to perform. He unstops the ears of men so that they may "hear his voice and live:" he loosens their tongues so that they may shew forth his praise. This he does by the invisible but effectual energy of his Spirit. Let those, who have never yet heard his voice, implore his aid: let those, who are yet unoccupied with his praises, entreat his favour. Soon shall all natural or acquired infirmities yield to his word^h, and "Ephphatha" be the commencement of a new and heavenly life.]

3. An encouragement for all to call upon him—

[The object of his compassion had nothing to recommend him: his desire of relief was sufficient to call forth the pity of our Lord. Who then should stay from our Lord on account of his unworthiness? Should we make our infirmities a reason for continuing far from him? Should we not rather take occasion from them to plead with him more earnestly? And would not he rejoice in manifesting his power and love towards us? Let every one then apply to him in humility and faith. No disorders, however complicated, shall be able to withstand his will. The believing suppliant shall soon experience the efficacy of his grace, and shall have occasion to add his testimony to theirs of oldⁱ—.]

^h Isai. xxxii. 3, 4.ⁱ ver. 37.

MCCCXXXI.

THE BLIND MAN HEALED.

Mark viii. 23—25. *And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town; and when he had spit on his eyes, and put his hands upon him, he asked him if he saw aught. And he looked up, and said, I see men as trees, walking. After that he put his hands again upon his eyes, and made him look up: and he was restored, and saw every man clearly.*

THIS miracle has many circumstances common to others. On other occasions our Lord manifested similar condescension and compassion: on other occasions also he both shewed his abhorrence of ostentation, and his displeasure at the obstinate

unbelief of men, by performing his miracles in private, and forbidding the persons who were cured to make them known. But the gradual manner in which he effected this cure is peculiar to this single miracle; we shall therefore fix our attention more particularly on that, and deduce from it some profitable observations.

I. Persons may be under the hand of Christ, and yet have but very imperfect views of spiritual things—

[This man had experienced somewhat of the power and grace of Christ. Yet he could not distinguish men from trees, except by their motion. Thus are many, of whom there is reason to hope well, extremely dark and indistinct in their views. They know very little of their own depravity, or of Christ's excellency, or of the nature of the spiritual warfare. Thus the Apostles themselves saw not the necessity of Christ's death^a, or the spiritual nature of his kingdom^b. Even after Christ's resurrection they could not conceive for what ends he was risen^c. Nor, for several years after the day of Pentecost, did they understand their entire freedom from the Mosaic law, or the purpose of God to make the Gentiles partakers of his salvation^d. We may well expect therefore to find some amongst ourselves, who, notwithstanding they are dear to Christ, still have "the veil in some measure upon their heart."]

Nor should this at all appear strange unto us. For,

II. Though our Lord could heal our blindness in an instant, yet he chooses rather to do it by the repeated use of the same means—

[Our Lord, if it had pleased him, could have healed the man without touching him at all; or have cured him instantly by the first touch. He needed not, like Elisha, to repeat the use of the same means, because he had not power in himself to render the first use of them effectual^e. But he saw fit to repeat the imposition of his hand in order to exercise the faith and patience of the blind man. Thus could he instantaneously enlighten our minds. He who commanded light to shine out of darkness, could with the same ease shine into our hearts with meridian splendour^f. But this is not his usual mode of proceeding in any part of his works. He perfected not the

^a Matt. xvi. 22.

^b Luke ix. 54.

^c Acts i. 6.

^d Peter needed repeated visions to overcome his prejudices; nor did any thing but a conviction of God's particular interposition prevent the whole college of Apostles from censuring Peter for preaching to Cornelius and his friends: Acts x. 28. and Acts xi. 17, 18.

^e 2 Kings iv. 33—35.

^f 2 Cor. iv. 6.

creation but in six successive days of labour. The vegetable, the animal, and the rational creation rise to maturity by degrees. Thus in the new creation of the soul he gradually informs and renews it. He makes use of his preached Gospel to open the eyes of the blind. Inadequate as these means are (even as the mere touch of a finger) he has appointed them for this end. He orders also the means to be continually used, as long as there remains the smallest imperfection in our sight. And he is pleased to render them conducive to the end proposed. He "leads us gradually into all truth^g," and enables us at last to comprehend the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of his unsearchable love^h.]

However imperfect his work in us now is, it must afford us consolation to consider,

III. Wherever he has begun the good work, there is reason to hope that he will carry it on to perfection—

[Never did our Lord leave one of his miracles imperfectly wrought. In the instance before us he presently perfected the cure he had begun. Thus may we hope he will do with respect to the illumination of our minds. If indeed, like Balaam, we be *only illuminated*, and *not* really *sanctified* by the truth, we may justly expect to perish with a more aggravated condemnationⁱ; but if we walk according to the light we have, that light shall surely be increased, and all saving blessings be communicated with it^k. Hence the Christian's path is compared to the sun rising to its meridian height^l. We have none of us reason to doubt, but that Christ will thus perfect that which concerneth us. He has promised to do so^m. On this ground St. Paul expresses his confidence, that he will complete the good work wherever he has begun itⁿ. We too may be confident, provided our faith be tempered with a holy fear^o. We may well argue with Manoah's wife, that he would not have revealed such things unto us, if he had intended to destroy us^p. We may regard his smaller gifts as an earnest and pledge of greater; and may be assured, that he who has been the Author of our faith will also be the Finisher of it^q.]

Surely this subject may well TEACH us,

1. Candour in respect to others—

^g John xvi. 13.

^h Eph. iii. 18, 19.

ⁱ Numb. xxiv. 3, 4. Heb. vi. 4—6.

^k 1 John i. 7.

^l Prov. iv. 18.

^m Ps. cxxxviii. 8.

ⁿ Phil. i. 6.

^o Rom. xi. 20.

^p Judg. xiii. 23.

^q Heb. xii. 2.

[If a person have not very distinct views of divine truth, we are apt to undervalue him, as though the “root of the matter were not in him.” But God honoured young Abijah because there was *some* good thing in him towards the Lord his God.” And if *God* does “not despise the day of small things,” should *we*? Is our brother “a babe? let us feed him with milk.” Is he “a lamb? let us carry him in our bosom.” Many “a babe and suckling” in divine knowledge stands higher in God’s estimation than those who value themselves as wise and prudent.]

2. Jealousy in reference to ourselves—

[If we have ever come to Christ aright, he has so far opened our eyes, that we are made to possess some spiritual discernment. Let us ask ourselves therefore, ‘What do I see, which flesh and blood could never have revealed unto me? — — — And am I desirous that my knowledge of my own heart may be more deep, my views of Christ be more enlarged, and my experience of the divine life in all its diversified operations be more manifested by its transforming efficacy upon my soul?’ Dear brethren, we must “grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ:” and if, “when for the time that we have been in the school of Christ we ought to be teachers of others, we need ourselves to be taught what are the first principles of the oracles of God,” we have reason to fear, that “the scales have never truly fallen from our eyes,” but that a veil of darkness is yet upon our hearts.]

3. Thankfulness to God, if he have given us the smallest insight into divine truth—

[I would not disparage worldly knowledge: but the Apostle Paul, who had made attainments in it beyond most, yet “counted it all but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord.” Yes indeed, a single ray of spiritual discernment is preferable to the meridian splendour of human science; since that will transform the soul, which earthly knowledge never can; and will save the soul, when the wise of this world shall be found to have prosecuted a mere phantom, and to have wasted their lives in a sad fruitless course of laborious folly. As to human sciences, they are not within the reach of all: but spiritual knowledge is: for God can open the eyes of the poor as well as of the rich; yea rather, “the things which he has hid from the wise and prudent, he reveals to babes,” that his power may be the more seen, and his name be the more glorified. If then the day have begun to dawn on any of you, rejoice: and beg of God that “your path may shine brighter and brighter unto the perfect day.”]

MCCCCXXXII.

THE GUILT AND DANGER OF BEING ASHAMED OF CHRIST.

Mark viii. 38. *Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.*

A SENSE of shame would never have been experienced, if man had abode in innocence. There is no room for shame in heaven, because there is no sin. But since man has become a guilty and corrupt creature, it is highly requisite that he should blush and be confounded before God. His shame should rise even to self-loathing and self-abhorrence. But so strangely has Satan blinded the eyes of men, that sin appears to them rather an object of glorying; and religion is regarded as the only thing of which we need to be ashamed. Hence iniquity is applauded, and piety decried. The Gospel, more especially, is made a butt of reproach and ridicule; and every method which the wit of man can devise, is used to bring vital godliness into disrepute and contempt. But our blessed Lord cautions his followers against yielding to the impressions of fear, or disguising their attachment to him through a wish to conciliate the esteem of men.

I. Who they are that are ashamed of Christ—

Though the “generation” amongst whom our Lord sojourned were distinguished for their wickedness, yet the present generation may with no less propriety be called “adulterous and sinful,” because the affections of men are almost universally alienated from God, their proper Lord and Husband, and the world with all its vanities is received to their embrace. That many among them should be ashamed of Christ and of his words, is the natural consequence of such a state of things. To determine who they are that answer to this character, we shall arrange them under distinct heads:

1. Those who openly disclaim all regard to Christ—

[How numerous this class is, a very little observation will suffice to teach us. The generality of men, if it were proved at this moment that there never had existed such a person as Jesus Christ, would have no one thing to alter in their conduct: *a sure proof that they never have paid any regard to him at all.* Indeed, they consider the fear of him as superstition, the love of him as enthusiasm, and all regard to him as a symptom of weakness and folly.

And what is this, but to “be ashamed of him,” or, as another Evangelist expresses it, to “deny him?” While they represent him as unworthy of any attention from his creatures, they degrade him as an impostor, and hold him up to universal contempt.]

2. Those who, while they feel some regard for him, are ashamed to manifest it before men—

[Many are persuaded in their minds, that the words of Christ are true, and that they who are obedient to them are the best and happiest of mankind: yet they dare not to unite themselves to this despised people, lest they should share in the obloquy that is cast upon them. They are ashamed to be seen conversing with any distinguished servant of Christ, or to be found in a Church where the Gospel is faithfully preached; or if they venture to go thither at any time, they assume an air of levity and indifference foreign to their real feelings, merely that they may not be thought to be tinctured with enthusiasm, or to have come thither for any other end than curiosity and amusement. They can hear the Gospel defamed, and the professors of it condemned as hypocrites and fanatics, and not dare to open their lips in vindication of either: yea, they can even join in profane jesting themselves, much sooner than they can utter the real sentiments of their hearts. Though, in a sense, they “believe in Christ, they dare not confess him^a.” And what is this but to be ashamed of Christ?]

3. Those who profess indeed a regard for him, but in circumstances of trial are afraid to maintain a consistent conduct—

[Many professors of religion are far from possessing that courage which is necessary to uphold them in times of persecution. Peter himself, though naturally courageous, was tempted to deny his Lord with oaths and curses: nor was he restored to God’s favour without many tears and bitter lamentations. And is there not reason to fear that many of us, if brought into similar circumstances, would resemble him? How few are there amongst us, who, like Daniel^b, would persist in

^a John xii. 42.

^b Dan. vi. 10.

the path of duty, when all around them had departed from it, and when a cruel death must be the immediate consequence of their fidelity to Christ? Yet the declining to sacrifice our lives in the cause of Christ would mark us out as persons ashamed of Christ, and subject us to his everlasting displeasure. Indeed it is to such characters that our Lord more immediately referred in the words before us^c; and therefore we cannot hesitate to class them among those to whom the warning in our text is given.]

Respecting all these, our Lord plainly informs us of,

II. The treatment which they must expect at his hands—

There is a day coming, when “the Son of Man,” who is now treated with such contempt, will appear in all the brightness of “his Father’s glory,” surrounded with myriads of “his holy angels,” and will summon the universe to his tribunal. “*Then* will he be ashamed of those who *now* are ashamed of him”—

His faithful servants he will then confess: he will declare, before all, his approbation of them, and his delight in them: he will welcome them as his brethren, and as joint-heirs of his eternal inheritance. But not one look of love will he vouchsafe to those who, through cowardice, or love of sin, have denied him. He will turn away his face from them, as one that is ashamed of them. If they begin to claim an acquaintance with him, and to plead the services they have rendered him, he will frown upon them, and, with a look of indignation and abhorrence, disclaim all knowledge of them^d. He will drive them from his presence, as unworthy of his favour, or of the company of his faithful people. And, O! who can conceive the anguish which these contemptuous sinners must endure; when the Saviour of the world shall thus retaliate upon them the treatment which he has received at their hands?]

This, I say, is the recompence which *they must expect* from him—

[He has plainly forewarned them respecting this; and therefore it shall come to pass. But, that they may see how just this doom will be, let them only consider *the folly and wickedness* of their conduct.

What *folly* is it to turn their back on Christ, through fear of a contemptuous look, or a reproachful name! What madness to “fear them who can only kill the body, rather than Him

^c Compare ver. 35.

^d Matt. vii. 22, 23.

who can destroy both body and soul in hell!" Does not such conduct render them contemptible, and justly subject them to the sentence with which they are threatened?

What desperate *wickedness* too is it to be ashamed of him who is the Only-beloved of the Father, and the object of incessant adoration to all the hosts of heaven! What horrible impiety, to pour contempt on him who left his glory for them; who for their sakes "hid not his face from shame and spitting;" yea, "who, for the joy of saving their souls alive, endured the cross and despised the shame," and "became obedient unto death, even the accursed death of the cross!" Let them only contemplate his kindness towards them, and then consider whether the punishment of their ingratitude exceed the quality of their offence.]

INFER—

1. How necessary is courage to those who embrace the Gospel!

[It is not possible to be faithful unto Christ, and at the same time escape the censures of the world^e. And our only alternative is, to "be faithful unto death," or to relinquish all hope of his favour. The fearful and unbelieving will take their portion together in the lake of fire and brimstone^f. O beg of God to endue your souls with courage, that you may "set your faces like a flint" against the whole ungodly world, and maintain your steadfastness even to the end.]

2. How desirable is it to be looking forward to the future judgment!

[If we attend only to the concerns of this life, we shall be anxious to preserve our reputation in the world. But if we consider how soon an unerring judgment will be passed upon us, we shall not regard the calumnies that are circulated respecting us, or the contempt that is poured upon us. This was St. Paul's experience^g; and similar considerations will produce similar benefit to our souls.]

3. How important is it to have just views of Christ!

[The more enlarged our apprehension is of his excellency and glory, the more shall we be emboldened to confess him before men. St. Paul endured more for him than any other Disciple ever did: yet neither reproach nor suffering could move him. And whence was it that he was thus immoveable? He himself tells us; "I am not ashamed; for I know in whom I have believed^h." Thus let us get a full

^e John xv. 18—20.

^f 2 Tim. ii. 12. Rev. xxi. 8.

^g 1 Cor. iv. 3, 4.

^h 2 Tim. i. 12.

persuasion of his power and faithfulness to support us under our tribulations, and reward us for them, and we shall not fear the face of man. We shall rather glory that we are counted worthy to suffer for his sake, and that we are honoured to be thus conformed to his image.]

MCCCCXXXIII.

A DEAF AND DUMB SPIRIT CAST OUT.

Mark ix. 25—27. *When Jesus saw that the people came running together, he rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, Come out of him, and enter no more into him. And the spirit cried, and rent him sore, and came out of him: and he was as one dead; insomuch that many said, He is dead. But Jesus took him by the hand, and lifted him up; and he arose.*

VARIOUS, and extremely opposite, were the states, which our Lord, in the course of his ministry, experienced. He was not wholly a stranger to seasons of exalted joy; but he was chiefly conversant with scenes of sorrow and affliction. He had just come down from the mount on which he had been transfigured, and the splendour of his glory was yet visible in his countenance^a; but he descended only to behold the miseries to which sin had reduced us, and to renew his labours among a scoffing and unbelieving people.

To bring into view the various circumstances of the history before us, we shall consider,

I. The wretched state of the youth who was brought to him—

Imagination can scarcely point out a more distressing scene than that exhibited in the context:

[Here was a youth afflicted with an epilepsy, or falling-sickness^b. This affliction was greatly increased by his being a lunatic^c: to complete his misery, he was possessed by an evil

^a This is not absolutely asserted by the Evangelist: but it is the most probable reason for the “great amazement” which the people discovered at the sight of him, ver. 15. This idea is confirmed by the account given us of Moses the Jewish lawgiver, who experienced a similar continuance of glory on his countenance after conversing with God on Mount Sinai, Exod. xxxiv. 29, 30. with 2 Cor. iii. 7.

^b Matt. xvii. 15.

^c Matt. xvii. 15.

spirit^d. This evil spirit took advantage of his natural infirmities, and impelled him, on the returns of his disorder, to rush into the fire, or into the water^e: he moreover tare and rent the youth with most execruciating agonies^f, and deprived him of the powers of speech and hearing^g. Thus had Satan tormented him even from his very childhood^h: so that, in the very bloom of life, the youth pined and languished in the extremest miseryⁱ.]

This scene too justly describes the invisible influence of Satan over the souls of men—

[We have reason to rejoice that his power over men's bodies is now greatly contracted, if not wholly destroyed. What a miserable world would this be, if the malice of that fiend were not restrained! but his power over the souls of men is as extensive as ever^k. He still takes advantage of our constitutional propensities^l; and impels us to the commission of of the most self-destructive acts^m. Doubtless much of our wickedness must be ascribed to our depraved appetites; but our malicious adversary concurs with them, and actuates us by themⁿ. While we continue to walk after the course of this world, and of those who are of the same age and station with ourselves, we are altogether his vassals^o; and the whole world, if viewed in a spiritual light, exhibits little else than such wretched spectacles as that before us^p.]

With such scenes, however, Jesus was continually conversant—

II. The application made to Jesus on his behalf—

The father of the youth had in vain applied to the Disciples for relief—

[The Disciples had been endued with power to cast out devils^q; but in this instance they were foiled in their attempt to exercise that power. This disappointment afforded to the unbelieving Scribes much occasion for malicious triumph^r. Our Lord, being asked afterwards by his Disciples in private, assigned the reasons of their failure. They had not made the attempt in the full exercise of faith^s. Had they truly believed, nothing should have been impossible to them. They had

^d Luke ix. 39.

^e ver. 22.

^f ver. 18.

^g ver. 25.

^h ver. 21.

ⁱ ver. 18.

^k 1 Pet. v. 8.

^l Some he stimulates to the pursuit of vain amusements, others to the gratification of grosser lusts and pleasures.

^m Acts xiii. 10. ⁿ Compare John xii. 6. with Luke xxii. 3—5.

^o Eph. ii. 2.

^p 2 Tim. ii. 26.

^q Matt. x. 8.

^r ver. 14.

^s Matt. xvii. 20.

moreover neglected to use extraordinary means on this extraordinary occasion. They should have had recourse to God in fasting and prayer^t. From these circumstances we may gather much useful instruction. Our Lord has promised us the victory over all the powers of darkness^u; but we must have our strength renewed by fasting and prayer^x — — — and must put it forth in a believing dependence on his word^y: nor can we hope to succeed but in the use of these appointed means.]

He now applied to Jesus himself—

[Kneeling with deepest humility, he implored the mercy which he needed^z; but manifested that the disappointment he had experienced had shaken his faith even in Jesus himself^a. Our Lord gently reproves him for his unbelief, and bids him be more concerned about the increase of his own faith than about the ability of the person to whom he was applying^b. The father instantly with tears confesses the justice of the reproof^c, and entreats the Lord to increase and confirm his faith. (How amiable was this concern for his child, and this contrition for his fault!) And should *we* be less earnest in interceding for our unconverted relatives? Like him, when human powers have failed, we are ready to question the sufficiency of God himself: but we should be careful never to limit the almighty power of Jesus; and should deeply bewail the sad remains of unbelief that are within us! Let us then labour more to imitate this afflicted parent, and in every application to Jesus offer that suitable petition^d—.]

Like thousands of other suppliants he soon obtained his request—

III. The miracle which Jesus wrought for him—

Our Lord immediately interposed for the relief of the youth; and Satan laboured to the utmost to obstruct his design—

[Jesus ordered the young man to be brought unto him. Satan, enraged at the prospect of his own disgrace, assaulted him with greater fury than ever, nor left him, till he had made one more effort to destroy his life^e. Satan exerted himself thus to defeat our Lord's purpose. Our Lord permitted him thus to act for the more abundant display of his own power. It is in this very manner that Satan still acts towards us; he

^t Matt. xvii. 21. It seems from hence that some of the evil spirits have more power and malignity than others. See also Matt. xii. 45.

^u Rom. xvi. 20.

^x Eph. vi. 18.

^y Eph. vi. 16.

^z Matt. xvii. 14.

^a ver. 22.

^b ver. 23.

^c ver. 24.

^d ver. 24.

^e ver. 26.

cannot endure that any soul should come to Jesus for help; he usually makes his fiercest assaults upon us, when he is fearful of losing his dominion over us^f. Yea, not unfrequently does he reduce us almost to a despair of life, just before our perfect deliverance is about to be effected.]

But in vain were Satan's efforts against the sovereign power of Jesus—

[Jesus raised up the youth, who lay, to all appearance, dead, and delivered him in perfect health to his astonished father^g. Thus shall also the grace of Jesus finally prevail in his people's hearts. In vain shall be the renewed attacks of their great adversary: however fiercely they be assaulted, they shall be more than conquerors over every enemy^h — — — And the malice of Satan shall only render them more distinguished monuments of their Redeemer's power.]

^f Some he discourages by inward suggestions, (you are not elect, your sins are too great, you have committed the sin against the Holy Ghost, &c.) and some by opposition from without.

^g Luke ix. 42.

^h Rom. viii. 37.

MCCCCXXXIV.

FASTING AND PRAYER.

Mark ix. 28, 29. *And when he was come into the house, his Disciples asked him privately, Why could not we cast him out? And he said unto them, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.*

THE gift of working miracles was possessed by all the Apostles. Yet it does not appear that the power could be exercised at all times, and at their own option, but only at such times and on such occasions as God saw fit to permit. Had the exercise of this gift been purely optional, we can scarcely conceive that Paul would have "left Trophimus at Miletum sick^a," when he wanted him much for his companion in travel; or that, when "Epaphroditus was sick nigh unto death," that same Apostle, who felt so deeply interested in his welfare, would not have interposed to restore him to health^b. It should seem, that a certain kind and degree of faith was necessary

^a 2 Tim. iv. 20.

^b Phil. ii. 27.

to be exercised by them, when they would put forth their miraculous powers; and that that faith was not always at their command, but needed to be brought down from heaven, by fresh and more abundant communications, in answer to their prayers. The Apostles, on having a youth, who was possessed by a dumb spirit, brought to them by his father, endeavoured to expel the demon from him, but were not able. The youth was then brought to Jesus himself, who, by a word, effected that which all his Disciples together could not effect. The Disciples then asked Jesus privately, What it was that had occasioned their failure? Our Lord told them, that they had failed through their want of faith; a more abundant measure of which was necessary, when so malignant a fiend as this was to be expelled: and that faith could be obtained only by a more particular and solemn application to God than they had used on this occasion: "for that kind could come forth by nothing but by fasting and prayer^c."

Miraculous gifts having ceased in the Church, we shall forbear to speak of *them*. But the power of Satan over men has not ceased: the only difference is, that formerly he could operate immediately upon the body, by a preternatural power, without any concurrence on our part; whereas now he can only act on the soul, *through the medium* of our own corruptions, and in concurrence with our own will. But, as formerly, it was not in the power of unassisted man to withstand his efforts; so neither at this time can we hope to prevail against him, but by a power received from on high. This is true at all times, and under all circumstances: but there are times and seasons when he appears to have assaulted us with more than ordinary violence, and to have gained a peculiar advantage over us, through the instrumentality of some deep-rooted corruption. To withstand him then, is found more difficult than at other times; and we can do nothing against him, without such a measure of grace and strength as is communicated to

^c Compare Matt. xvii. 19—21. with the text.

those only who, with deliberate and determined purpose of heart, set themselves to seek it in solemn fasting and prayer. In reference, then, to these occasions we may well apply the text: in doing which, I will shew,

I. The extraordinary difficulties which some have to encounter—

There is no man who has not much to encounter both from within and from without. But some have far greater difficulties to contend with than others,

1. From the great adversary of souls—

[We know but little respecting angels; except that the good angels are “ministering spirits, sent forth to minister unto those who are the heirs of salvation;” and that the evil angels are occupied in constant endeavours to ensnare and ruin the souls of men. Of the evil angels, as well as of the good, there are different ranks and orders, called “angels and principalities and powers;” and that they act under the guidance of one, even of “Beelzebub, who is the prince of the devils^d.” It should seem, too, that some possess a deeper measure of malignity than others; since one spirit, on being driven out of a man, is said to “take unto himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and to enter into him again, and make his last state worse than the first^e.” Sometimes several of them take possession of a man at once: for “out of Mary Magdalen our Lord cast seven devils;” and out of another person a whole “legion.” Over Satan’s family these bear an undisputed sway^f: and over the godly themselves they maintain a very considerable influence; insomuch, that, if not restrained by Almighty God, they would “sift” every living man “as wheat,” and reduce even an inspired Apostle to chaff^g. On some he acts “by guile, putting on the semblance of “an angel of light^h :” and so subtle are “his wiles,” and so crafty “his devices,” that it is inconceivably difficult to be always on our guard against themⁱ. Love to the Saviour himself may even be perverted by him into an occasion of evil; and be rendered, through the ignorance and inadvertence of man, subservient to the advancement of Satan’s purposes^k. At other times, Satan comes rather “like a roaring lion, ready to devour us^l ;” and, with an overwhelming power, carries men to the commission of the most palpable

^d Matt. xii. 24.

^e Matt. xii. 45.

^f John viii. 41.

^g Luke xxii. 31, 32. ^h 2 Cor. xi. 3, 14.

ⁱ 2 Cor. ii. 11. Eph. vi. 11.

^k Matt. xvi. 21—23.

^l 1 Pet. v. 8.

and damning sins; instigating Judas to betray his Lord^m, and Ananias and Sapphira to "lie unto the Holy Ghostⁿ." Well is he called "the god of this world;" for, by blinding some^o, and impelling others, he maintains a sway over all "the children of disobedience^p."

Now, to contend with these is, more or less, the lot of all God's people^q: but some experience his assaults in a more violent degree than others; and would be utterly destroyed by his "fiery darts," if God had not furnished them with "the shield of faith, whereby to quench" or ward them off^r.]

2. From their own indwelling corruptions—

[All have a "heart full of evil^s:" but there is a "spiritual and a fleshly filthiness;" and in some the one has the ascendant; and in others, the other. Some, from their very infancy, are swollen with pride, or corroded with envy, or inflamed with passion, or envenomed with malice. Some betray a very early propensity to deceit, and falsehood, and dishonesty, and selfishness in all its bearings. In some profaneness and impiety are dominant; so that, without any interest to serve, or lust to gratify, they will find pleasure in insulting to his face the Most High God. In others, a disposition to lewdness and intemperance is marked from a very early period of life; and soon acquires such an entire dominion, that it bids defiance to all the efforts that are made to check it; nor can all the calamities which it entails on its unhappy victim induce him to withstand its influence. In truth, to such a degree are many subjected to some reigning sin, whether of a spiritual or fleshly nature, that one cannot but regard them as under Satanic influence; or, to use the words of St. Paul, as "taken in the snare of the devil, and as led captive by him at his will^t."]

Now, where men are thus enslaved by any besetting sin, they have difficulties which others have scarcely any idea of: and to them I would declare,

II. The extraordinary means which they should use, in order to surmount them—

Resolutions will be of little avail: they will yield to even the smallest temptation. The passionate man may resolve to restrain his anger; the drunkard to contract a habit of sobriety; the lewd person to mortify his passions: but he resolves in vain, as long as his resolutions are formed in dependence on his

^m John xiii. 27.

ⁿ Acts v. 3.

^o 2 Cor. iv. 4.

^p Eph. ii. 2.

^q Eph. vi. 12.

^r Eph. vi. 16.

^s Eccl. ix. 3.

^t 2 Tim. ii. 26.

own strength: he returns, again and again, “like a dog to his vomit;” nor can all the bitter consequences which he has experienced in this world, nor those more awful terrors which he is taught to expect in the world to come, suffice to keep him steadfast to his purpose. Even prayer itself has but a slight and transient effect; insomuch that, in some instances, he is even afraid to pray; because it seems as if his very prayers only stirred up his enemy to renew with greater vigour and success his irresistible assaults. But, by the ordinances of our Church, as well as by the Holy Scriptures, we are taught, and especially at this season^u, that “with prayer, fasting” should be joined—

[Fasting is a duty enjoined by God himself. Under the law, a day was appointed whereon the whole nation of Israel were to observe an annual fast^x: and all the most eminent servants of God recorded in the Old Testament combined fasting with prayer^y. Under the New Testament dispensation the same duty is inculcated, and, on proper occasions, was practised also by the servants of the Lord^z. For seasons of affliction, it is peculiarly suited; and, above all, for such a season as has been before described. *It tends to honour God, whom we have offended by our sins. It tends to humble ourselves, as being itself an acknowledgment of our desert of his wrath. It tends to mortify the very corruptions we mourn over: and it greatly aids our urgency in prayer.* In these respects it may justly be deemed of great importance: for though in itself it has no kind of merit, yet, as manifesting our sincerity, and approving us both to God and to our own consciences, it is of singular use, especially if accompanied with a corresponding humiliation of our souls before God: for, without that, it will be only an empty ceremony, an hypocritical profession, a senseless mockery.]

Though neither of them apart should have prevailed, the two combined will be effectual for the desired end—

[In no instance has God ever withheld his blessing from the two combined. Prayer alone, if fervent and believing, will not be suffered to go forth in vain; but, in the extraordinary cases before referred to, a man truly in earnest will address

^u *Lent.*

^x Lev. xxiii. 27—29.

^y Ezra viii. 21. Neh. i. 4. Esth. iv. 16.

^z Mark ii. 20. Matt. vi. 17. Luke ii. 37. 2 Cor. xi. 27.

himself to the work of prayer in the more solemn attitude of penitential sorrow, “in weeping, and mourning, and fasting^a.” And how successful such prayer shall be, may be seen in the case of Nineveh, where the whole city was spared from destruction in consequence of their turning to the Lord in fasting and in prayer^b. The example of Daniel is yet more encouraging than this, inasmuch as it brought down upon him not merely a suspension from evil, but the most extraordinary tokens of God’s favour. See how his fast was conducted; and with what fervent prayers it was accompanied: and then see what an answer it brought down from heaven^c: and know, assuredly, that such humiliation shall prevail, whatever enemies you have to contend with, whatever corruptions you have to strive against.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are yielding to their spiritual enemies—

[Many think it sufficient to say, that such or such propensities are naturally inherent in them; and that they are regarded rather as constitutional infirmities, than as any deep grounds for personal humiliation. But, on this ground, there is no sin whatever which may not be cloked with a suitable apology. That a man will find a greater difficulty in mortifying his besetting sin, is true: and that he will, to his latest hour, be more in danger from it, is also true: but it must be put away^d; and, if not subdued and mortified, it will inevitably plunge the soul into everlasting perdition. The eye, the hand, the foot, are natural, and dear, and necessary: but, if any one of them stand in competition with our duty, it must not be spared: there is no alternative, but to part with that, or to have both body and soul cast into the flames of hell^e. If a man shall say ‘I have grace, but not enough for that;’ I answer, that *grace insufficient, is no grace*; and that the man who thinks he is a partaker of divine grace, whilst he is led captive by any constitutional or habitual sin, is only deceiving his own soul, and will find out his error when it is past a remedy^f. A life of alternate sinning and repenting, sinning and repenting, (a life, alas! too common amongst those who profess religion,) will never be approved of God. I will readily allow that a man may have more than ordinary difficulties to contend with; but then he must adopt more than ordinary measures for the surmounting of them; and if he will not do this, he has only himself to blame: for “there is no kind, either of spirit or corruption, that shall not go forth by prayer and fasting.”]

^a Joel ii. 12.

^b Jonah iii. 7—10.

^c Dan. ix. 3—5, 17—23.

^d Heb. xii. 1.

^e Mark ix. 43—48.

^f Jam. i. 26.

2. Those who are conflicting with them—

["Be strong, and of good courage: for no enemy shall be able to stand before you." Only go forth in faith, and all the Goliaths in the universe shall fall under your hand. God has said, that, "provided you are not under the law, but under grace, sin shall not have dominion over you^g." "The grace of Christ, which was sufficient for" Paul, shall be alike sufficient for all who trust in it^h. A very "worm shall thresh the mountains, and reduce them all to dustⁱ:" and Satan himself, that great enemy, shall be bruised under the feet of all who will withstand him manfully^k. The armour provided for us shall not be girt on in vain^l. Only go forth in the strength of the Lord Jesus^m, and you shall "be more than conquerors through Him that loveth youⁿ."]]

^g Rom. vi. 14.

^h 2 Cor. xii. 9.

ⁱ Isai. xli. 14—16.

^k 1 Pet. v. 8, 9. Jam. iv. 7. Rom. xvi. 20.

^l Eph. vi. 11.

^m Eph. vi. 10.

ⁿ Rom. viii. 37.

MCCCCXXXV.

CHRIST'S INTEREST IN HIS PEOPLE.

Mark ix. 41, 42. *Whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, He shall not lose his reward. And whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea.*

THOUGH the Lord requires decision of character, where full information exists; and therefore says in one place, "He that is not with me, is against me; and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth abroad^a;" yet, in the passage before us, in reference to one who, for want of fuller information, did not follow with his Disciples, he said, "He that is not against us, is on our part." There may be real integrity, where, from peculiar circumstances, there may be little profession: and where integrity of heart is, there will the Lord make due allowance for defects, which, under different circumstances, would provoke his heavy displeasure. The Apostles were, in this respect, but ill-instructed. They would have disallowed a brother altogether,

^a Matt. xii. 30.

because he came not up to their standard: but our Lord told them, that, however weak his children were, he would *reward every benefit conferred upon them*, and *resent every injury done to them*.

Let us consider,

I. The interest which Christ takes in his believing people—

He completely identifies himself with them, and receives as done to himself whatever is done to them,

1. In a way of good—

[Scarcely any thing can be less than a cup of water: yet, if given to any one because he belongs to Christ, the donor of it “shall not lose his reward.” *It is necessary that it be given for Christ's sake*; else, though it may be an act of *humanity*, it is no act of *piety*: but given for his sake, it is, and shall be, accepted of him, and be richly recompensed in the day of judgment^b — — —]

2. In a way of evil—

[To “offend” one of his little ones, is to cast a stumbling-block before him, by which he may fall. And this may be done either by temptation or persecution: but, in whatever way it be done, whether by allurement or menace, it shall be visited with God's wrathful indignation. To “have a mill-stone hanged about one's neck, and to be cast into the sea,” would be a fearful judgment: but “a far sorer judgment” awaits the man who endeavours to turn from Christ one of the least of his people, or to impede his progress heavenward^c. Christ considers this also as done to himself^d, and will resent it accordingly — — —]

If we view this aright, we cannot doubt,

II. The return it calls for at our hands—

Surely it calls for,

1. Admiration—

[How wonderful is it, that our adorable Redeemer should so condescend to notice what is done to us, and to regard “the touching of us as the touching of the apple of his eye!” It were absolutely incredible, if he had not so minutely and specifically affirmed it — — —]

2. Affiance—

[Is our Lord and Saviour so interested in our behalf? What can we ever want? or what is there which we have to

^b Matt. xxv. 40.

^c Heb. x. 28, 29.

^d Acts ix. 4.

fear? David says, “The Lord is my Shepherd; therefore I shall not want^e :” and sure I am that we, under the Christian dispensation, are not a whit less privileged than he — — —]

3. Gratitude—

[What shall we not do for Him, who so cares for us? And can we reach him, so to speak, by benefiting his poorer members? Whatever then I would do for Him, if he were personally present with me, *that* I will do for his Church and people; accounting nothing too much to do or suffer, if only I may please him, and honour him — — —]

ADDRESS—

1. Are there here any who have discouraged the saints?

[Possibly you may have done it only by sneers and ridicule; but, in whatever way it may have been, remember the warning here given you, and repent of your conduct ere it be too late. If you do not choose to go to heaven yourselves, beware how you aggravate your guilt, by making yourselves accountable also for the souls of others. It will be a fearful thing to have the blood of others required at your hands———]

2. Are there any who have delighted to do them good?

[“Be not weary of well-doing; for in due season you shall reap, if you faint not” — — — None are to be excluded from your benevolent exertions: but “the household of faith” have a peculiar claim^f, as the members of Christ’s body, and as the very representatives of Christ himself^g — — —]

^e Ps. xxiii. 1.

^f Gal. vi. 10.

^g If this were a *Charity Sermon*, it would be proper here to recommend an united attention to the *spiritual* wants of the poor with the relief of their *temporal* necessities. See *both* referred to in the text.

MCCCCXXXVI.

AN OFFENDING MEMBER.

Mark ix. 43—48. *If thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thy foot offend thee cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet, to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thine eye*

offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell-fire: where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.

TO oppose and persecute the people of God is to make God himself our enemy; nor can we cast a stumbling-block in their way without aggravating thereby our own condemnation^a. But it is not only by open profaneness that we endanger our salvation; we are no less obnoxious to the displeasure of God if we retain any secret sin. Hence our Lord gives us the most solemn and repeated admonition to cut off every occasion of sin. In discoursing on his words we shall consider,

I. His injunctions—

There are many things which prove to us an occasion of sin—

[We are too ready to be drawn aside by our *worldly interests*. How often have they led men to profane the Sabbath, to engage in unlawful occupations, to practise deceit and falsehood, and in a thousand other ways to violate the dictates of their conscience! How has an undue regard to them deterred many from embracing the Gospel and following the Lord fully^b! And how many have been turned aside by them from the truth of God, even after they had maintained a long and honourable profession^c! *Carnal affections* also frequently prove a very fatal snare. How many spiritual people have been led to connect themselves for life with an unconverted person, through an unwillingness to thwart their natural inclinations, and *that* too, in opposition to the most express commands of God^d? How many through an excess of attachment have idolized the creature while they possessed it, and murmured against God the instant it was removed? Need we add *sensual appetites* to this black catalogue? who, that knows the danger of an impure look^e, must not tremble?]

These, as soon as ever we discover their baneful tendency, should be cut off—

[We are far from condemning these things as bad in themselves. Our carnal appetites and affections were given us to be indulged, and our worldly interests indispensably require a considerable degree of care and attention; but when

^a ver. 42.

^b Mark x. 22.

^c 2 Tim. iv. 10.

^d 2 Cor. vi. 14, 17.

^e Matt. v. 28, 29.

they become stumbling-blocks to us and betray us into sin, then they become sinful in themselves, and must instantly be cut off. Nor must any consideration whatever induce us to spare them. If they be dear to us as an "eye," or useful and apparently necessary to us as a "hand" or "foot," we must sacrifice them without pity or reserve. Different situations indeed call for much prudence and discretion in the execution of this duty. We must not lose sight of meekness and humility when we are exercising a necessary firmness and self-denial. Nevertheless we must not tamper with our consciences, but fulfil our duty, and leave events to God.]

To aid us in obeying our Lord's injunctions let us consider,

II. The arguments with which he enforced them—

Men in general are averse to hear any thing of the terrors of the Lord; but St. Paul insisted on them in order to persuade men; and our Lord himself frequently urged them on his hearers as inducements to obedience. The arguments with which he enforced his precepts in the text are most solemn and weighty:

1. God will surely deal with men hereafter according to their conduct in this life—

[This truth is not merely asserted, but assumed in the text as incontrovertible and undoubted: nor is there any truth whatever that is more agreeable to reason, or more abundantly confirmed by the sacred oracles^f. And can any thing be a stronger argument for self-denial? Surely if eternal happiness or misery must be the issue of our conduct, we should diligently consider our ways, and put away the accursed thing that would ruin our souls. If we had no future account to give of our conduct, we might say, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die;" but, if we believe the Scriptures, we shall rather labour to act with a view to the future judgment.]

2. Heaven, notwithstanding all the trials we may endure in our way to it, is infinitely better than hell, whatever we may enjoy in our way thither—

[It is certain that the mortification of sin is often painful, like the cutting off a member from the body. But it is no less certain that *that* pain is followed by much peace and joy. But supposing the road to heaven were ever so thorny, will not eternal glory be a sufficient recompence for our toil? And

^f Rom. viii. 13. Gal. vi. 7, 8.

supposing the gratifications of sin to be without alloy (though it will be found that the delicious draught is mixed with much gall) will they not be dearly purchased with the loss of the soul? Will not the torments of hell be greater than the pleasures of sin? The worms that may feed upon the body will die when our flesh is consumed; and the fire that may consume our body will be extinguished at last for want of fuel: but “the worm that will gnaw our conscience will never die; nor will the fire of God’s wrath be ever quenched,” because we shall be preserved as food for the one and fuel for the other to all eternity. What can sin offer us that can compensate for such a doom? Surely then this argument should induce us to mortify our most beloved lusts. Our Lord repeats it thus frequently, that it may the more deeply impress our minds. Let us then weigh it with the attention it deserves; and act as those who feel its force and importance.]

INFER—

1. In what a lamentable state are the world at large!

[Men will persuade themselves that they are in the way to heaven, even while they are neglecting many duties, and committing many actual sins. But can they derive much encouragement from the words of our text? O that they did but credit the declarations of our Lord! Shall they, who retain only *one* bosom lust, be in danger of “hell-fire,” and they be safe who live in the *allowed* commission of *many* sins? Have *they* no reason to dread the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched? Shall they set up their idols in their heart, and God not answer them according to the multitude of their idols^g? Would to God that we could weep over such poor deluded creatures; that “our head were waters, and our eyes a fountain of tears to run down for them day and night!” May God give them just views of the eternal world! And may they be so persuaded by these terrors of the Lord as to flee immediately from the wrath to come, and to lay hold on eternal life!]

2. What need have the professors of religion to watch over their own hearts!

[It is no easy thing to know whether we be freed from our besetting sin. We have many pleas to urge in extenuation of its guilt, and many specious names whereby to conceal its malignity. How were even the Disciples themselves led captive by ambition and revenge, when they were least aware of their subjection to such evil principles^h! Thus it may be with us also. How then should we search and try our hearts to find

^g Ezek. xiv. 4.

^h ver. 35. Luke ix. 54.

out our besetting sins! And how should we cry to God, "Search me, O God, and try the ground of my heart, &c.ⁱ!" Let all then who name the name of Christ be jealous of themselves. And, "laying aside every weight, and the sin that doth most easily beset them, let them run their race with patience."]

3. What reason have we to be thankful for the covenant of grace!

[Whatsoever God requires of us, he has also promised to us in the covenant of grace. Has he commanded us to part with every sin, however precious or profitable it may be? He has also promised, that "sin shall not have dominion over us^k." He has pledged his word not only to forgive the sins of the penitent, but to "cleanse them from all unrighteousness^l." Let those then who tremble at the injunctions in the text, look up to Jesus for help. Let them plead the promises which he has made. And doubtless they shall find his "grace sufficient for them." "They shall do all things through Christ strengthening them." This is the portion of all who embrace that covenant, which "is ordered in all things and sure^m." Let every believer then rejoice in that covenant; and "hold fast the beginning of his confidence steadfast unto the end."]

ⁱ Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24.

^k Rom. vi. 14.

^l 1 John i. 9.

^m 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

MCCCCXXXVII.

CHRISTIANS TO HAVE SALT IN THEMSELVES.

Mark ix. 49, 50. *Every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt. Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his saltness, wherewith will ye season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another.*

TO understand this subject aright, we must take into consideration the whole context. The Disciples had disputed amongst themselves about precedency in their Master's kingdom, which they supposed to be of a temporal nature; every one of them coveting for himself the highest post of dignity and power^a. They had also, through jealousy and narrowness of mind, forbidden a person to cast out devils, merely because he did not exercise that power in concert

^a ver. 33—37.

with *them*, and in subserviency to *them*^b. These evil dispositions our Lord had reprov'd, by appropriate and weighty observations: and then he proceeded to declare to them, that the exercise of such corrupt feelings would issue in the everlasting destruction of all who should indulge them, and would plunge them into "that fire of hell which never should be quenched^c." After repeating, no less than five times, that "the fire into which they should be cast should never be quenched," he told them that he expected very different tempers from them. The terms which he used on this occasion you have just heard: they contain a solemn admonition, and suitable advice; each of which we will consider in its order. Let us notice, then,

I. His solemn admonition—

This is somewhat difficult to be understood. Commentators, supposing that the word "*for*," with which my text is introduced, is to be taken as connecting the text with the words immediately preceding, explain the first clause of our text thus: 'The fire, into which the persons before spoken of shall be cast, shall never be quenched: neither shall the persons that are cast into it be consumed: *for every one of them shall be salted with fire*: and, as salt preserves from putrefaction the things that are impregnated with it, so shall the fire preserve from dissolution those who shall be subjected to its power.'

This interpretation is far from satisfactory; because it places two perfectly similar expressions, that which I have read, and that which follows it, in direct opposition to each other, (the one as referring to the destruction of the soul, and the other to the preservation of it,) when they are evidently intended to convey the same truth under two different figures.

To get rid of this difficulty, one commentator^d would translate the word thus: "Every one shall be salted *for* the fire." But any one, who looks at the original, will see that such a translation is utterly inadmissible.

^b ver. 38—41.

^c ver. 42—48.

^d Macknight.

The translation, as it stands, is right: nor will the sense be difficult, if only the word “*for*” be taken as *connecting the text with the whole subject contained in the context*. The whole may be explained thus: ‘I expect of you, in future, a different state of mind from that which you have recently indulged. You are offered up as living sacrifices to God; and, as such, must be holy, and without blemish: and as the sacrifices under the law were offered through the instrumentality of fire, and always with the accompaniment of salt, so must you be salted with fire, and salted with salt, in order that your savour may come up with acceptance before God.’

If it be said that the term “salting with fire” is a strange expression; I answer, it is no more strange as applied to *the preservation of the soul from sin*, than as applied to *the preservation of the body from destruction*. On the contrary, it is expressly sanctioned by the Holy Scriptures in the sense now put upon it; whereas it is nowhere sanctioned in the sense which I am now controverting. John the Baptist says, “Christ shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and *with fire*.” And it is no more strange to be “*salted with fire*,” than to be “*baptized with fire*.” If it be said, that “*baptizing with fire*” means only *the enduing with grace, which shall purify as fire*; I answer, this is the precise meaning which I annex to the “*salting with fire*,” namely, *the enduing with grace, which shall purify as fire*. The two expressions are precisely parallel, both in terms and import. And, this interpretation brings *unity* into the subject in the place of *discord*; and *simplicity* in the place of *inexplicable confusion*.

Having, I hope, thrown the true light upon this difficult passage, I now proceed to comment upon it, as *an injunction from our blessed Lord*.

[Under the Mosaic Law, this was God’s command: “Every oblation of thy meat-offering shalt thou season with salt; neither shalt thou suffer the salt of the covenant of thy God to be lacking from thy meat-offering: with all thine

° Luke iii. 16.

offerings thou shalt offer salt^f." To that ordinance our Lord refers, when he says, "Every one shall be salted with fire; and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt." But as salt, however good, may possibly "lose its saltness," so as to become unfit for the service of God; so may immortal souls lose the divine savour which is pleasing to God: and, as the salt in that case is "fit for nothing, not even for the land, nor yet for the dunghill;" so those professors of religion, who lose the spirituality of their minds, must be regarded as the most unprofitable and contemptible of mankind^g. Now, the allowed indulgence of such base feelings as the Apostles had lately manifested was incompatible with spiritual-mindedness; and therefore our Lord warned them, that, if they would be useful as ministers, or be accepted as men, they must mortify all such corrupt affections, and shew themselves to be under the influence of a purer principle. And the same admonition is proper for *us* also: for we, it is to be feared, are, for the most part, as worldly and as carnal as they. Look at the state of the Christian world: see how ready men are, yea, even good men, to dispute and quarrel about every thing that concerns their interests in the world — — — See, too, how ready Christians are to deery and to discourage those who move not in their line, and belong not to their party — — — in a word, let the spirit of Christians, both of individuals and communities, be seen at this day; and it must be acknowledged, that the admonition in my text has in no degree lost its force, or its applicability to the souls of men.]

In connexion with this solemn admonition, we must consider,

II. His suitable advice—

The advice here given *evidently refers to the whole context*, and, in this respect, confirms the interpretation which we have given of the preceding clauses of our text. The Disciples had given way to very evil tempers and dispositions; and, to counteract such corrupt propensities in future, our Lord says to them, "Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another." The same counsel is proper for us also:

1. Have salt in yourselves—

[We, whether as ministers or as private Christians, are to be "the salt of the earth^h;" not only richly imbued with grace in our own souls, but operating, all of us in our respective spheres, to keep the world around us from corruption. But

^f Lev. ii. 13.

^g Luke xiv. 34, 35.

^h Matt. v. 13.

how can we fulfil our office for the benefit of others, or how can we answer to our proper character as true believers, if there be not a savour of divine grace abiding in us, and diffused around us? In all our intercourse with God, we must exercise a spirituality of mind: for what is prayer without devotion? or what is praise without fervent love and adoring gratitude? In truth, what are any services whatever, if sin be unmortified, and corruption unsubdued? "If we retain any iniquity in our hearts, the Lord will not hear usⁱ." "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord: it is the prayer of the upright only that is his delight^k." The same may be said of all our intercourse with men. God's direction to us is, "Let your speech be always with grace, *seasoned with salt*^l." It is not necessary that we be always conversing about religion: but it is necessary that there always be found in us a religious frame of mind, and that not a word escape from our lips that is inconsistent with it. "As sons of God, we must be blameless and harmless, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, shining among them as lights in the world^m:" and if we attain not to this character, "all the labour that has been bestowed upon us will be in vainⁿ."

But, that we may come more directly to the point which our Lord had chiefly in view, I add,]

2. Have peace one with another—

[Love ought to be the one habit of the Christian's mind, and the very element in which he moves. It is a shame to him to betray ambitious, envious, contentious dispositions; or to value his brother less on account of some minor differences, when he is evidently, in his own sphere, doing the Lord's work. These, and such like dispositions, are the fruitful sources of contention and hatred; as St. James has said: "From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts which war in your members^o?" Now the Christian world need exceedingly to be instructed on this point. All will admit that they need to "have salt in themselves;" whilst yet they imagine that that will consist with bigotry and contention. But I must say to all such characters, "If ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above; but is earthly, sensual, devilish^p." If we would approve ourselves upright before God, we must "walk worthy the vocation wherewith we are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavouring

ⁱ Ps. lxvi. 18.

^k Prov. xv. 8.

^l Col. iv. 6.

^m Phil. ii. 15.

ⁿ Phil. ii. 16.

^o Jam. iv. 1.

^p Jam. iii. 14, 15.

to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace^a." This is necessary to the enjoyment of God's presence here: for then only, "when we are of one mind, and *live in peace*, will the God of love and peace be with us^r." It is necessary, also, for our acceptance with him in a better world; according as it is written, "*Follow peace* with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord^s." Remember, brethren, this is essential to your character, as "living sacrifices^t;" and without this ye will in vain hope to be "acceptable offerings before God^u." What then God has joined together, let no man put asunder; but seek first to "have salt in yourselves, and then to live in peace and love one with another."]

^a Eph. iv. 1—3.

^r 2 Cor. xiii. 11.

^s Heb. xii. 14.

^t Rom. xii. 1.

^u Rom. xv. 16.

MCCCCXXXVIII.

CHRIST BLESSES LITTLE CHILDREN.

Mark x. 13—16. *And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them: and his disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein. And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them.*

IT is common with men to shew partiality to the failings of their friends, at the time that they are leaning rather to the side of severity in their judgment of others. But our blessed Lord shewed no favour to his Disciples in that respect; but was as observant of smaller errors in them, as of the more flagrant transgressions of his enemies. He ever proceeded upon that principle, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for your iniquities." His Disciples had interposed to prevent him from being troubled with a multitude of children, whom their fond parents foolishly, as the Disciples thought, were bringing to him: but he was very angry with them, and gave them a severe rebuke: for however they might take credit to themselves for

meaning well, their conduct in this matter was highly reprehensible.

The text presents two things to our view :

I. His rebuke to them—

Some parents were bringing their children to Christ—

[To this they had probably been induced by the discourse which had recently passed between our Lord and his Disciples. On their inquiring, Who should be the greatest in his kingdom? he had set a little child before them, and declared that a conformity to it in humility constituted the most exalted character of his subjects; and that whosoever should receive one such little child in his name, would receive him; whilst those who should offend one, would involve themselves in the most tremendous guilt and misery^a. Hence it would naturally be supposed that Jesus had a peculiar love for little children; and that as he required others to receive them, he himself would certainly receive, and bless them too. Hence many believing parents sought to avail themselves of the opportunity of obtaining a blessing for their children; and brought them to him, that he might “put his hands upon them and bless them.” It was not *bodily*, but *spiritual*, health, which the parents sought for their children: and we cannot but highly applaud their zeal in such a cause.]

But the Disciples interposed to prevent it—

[They doubtless thought that they were doing right, in not suffering their Lord to be so troubled. His *time*, they thought, was too *precious* to be so occupied; his *work* too *important* to be so interrupted; his *engagements* too *numerous* to admit of such intrusions; his *fatigues* too *great* to be so needlessly increased. Besides, *to the children*, they supposed, it could be of *little use*: and *to the parents*, only a *momentary gratification*: and if *the precedent* were once admitted, it *would be followed to an unknown extent*. Hence they would not suffer their Lord to be so distracted.

But, whilst they imagined that their conduct was precisely such as it ought to be, they were really acting a very unbecoming part. It is not every one who *means* well, that *acts* well: there is “a zeal that is not according to knowledge;” and such was theirs on the present occasion. Their conduct was indeed very criminal in many respects: It argued *low thoughts of their Divine Master*, whose condescension they limited; whilst, in truth, it is infinite. It argued *an ignorance of his office*,

^a Matt. xviii. 1—6.

which is peculiarly designated by the prophet, as that of “a Shepherd, who carries the lambs in his bosom^b.” It argued *an unmindfulness of the Father’s grace*, who had promised, in a peculiar manner, to pour out his Spirit upon his people’s seed, and his blessing upon their offspring^c.” It argued *unkindness to the parents*, whose feelings they should have more affectionately consulted; and *indifference to the children*, whose benefit they should have been studious to promote. It argued also *an unbelief of its efficacy*: they had often seen people obtaining health to their bodies by a mere touch of their Master’s garment, and yet they could not conceive that any benefit should accrue to the children’s souls by an authoritative imposition of his hands, and an immediate communication of his blessing. All this was exceedingly sinful. But they erred also in *the manner* as well as in *the matter*, of their conduct; for they “rebuked” these pious women. Alas! even good men, if unreasonably interrupted, are but too apt to shew an unhallowed temper, instead of exercising that meekness and gentleness which become their profession.]

Our Lord, however, deservedly and severely rebuked them—

[In St. Matthew’s account there is a little change in the collocation of the words, which makes his address to them more emphatical^d; “Let the little children alone, and hinder them not from coming to me.” But our Lord assigns as the reason of this reproof, (for he never would administer reproof without evincing the justice of it,) that “of such persons was the kingdom of God;” of *such in age*, and of *such in character*. Some confine this expression to *the character* of the persons who compose his kingdom: but, in so doing, they destroy all the force of his reasoning. If our Lord had meant only to say, that children were fit *emblems* of his subjects, it would have been no reason for his reproof; since they would be neither more so by being brought to him, nor less so by being kept away. But, if we understand that children are still, as under the Jewish dispensation, to be regarded as in covenant with God, and subjects of his kingdom, then the reason is clear and strong: for to keep children from him, would be to deprive them of privileges to which they were as much entitled as adults. Our Church lays peculiar stress upon this point in her baptismal service^e; and shews with great clearness, that it is a complete justification of those who maintain the propriety

^b Isai. xl. 11. ^c Isai. xlv. 3, 4. compared with Acts ii. 39.

^d Matt. xix. 14.

^e See the Address to the parents, after the passage recording St. Mark’s words in the Baptismal service.

of *infant baptism*: for, if infants are capable of receiving Christ's blessing, are we not to bring them to him that they may obtain it? If they are capable of receiving *the thing signified*, are they not fit subjects to receive *the sign*? And if Christ was so angry with his Disciples for keeping them from him, can he be pleased with us, if we keep them from him? In a word, Christ has shewn us, by this act, that children are as much the subjects of his kingdom now, as ever they were under the Jewish dispensation; and every member of our Church has reason to rejoice, that the sentiments of our Reformers on this disputed subject were in such perfect unison with the word of God.

If it be objected, that Christ did not baptize the children; we answer, His baptism was not yet instituted: the only baptism that was now observed, was that of John. The question is, Are children to be regarded as subjects of Christ's kingdom? and are they entitled to the privileges of that kingdom? Christ expressly says, they are: and so say *we*: and therefore according to his command we bring them to him, that they may be admitted to a participation of those blessings, precisely as the Jews by God's command brought their children to be admitted into covenant with him.]

In perfect agreement with these sentiments is,

II. His instruction to us—

Our Lord uniformly engrafted some general instruction on the passing occurrences of every day. He here instructs us,

1. By precept—

[Whilst children are to be received into the Church of Christ, they are to be regarded also as emblems of those moral qualities, which all the subjects of his kingdom must possess. There is in children a simplicity of mind, a teachableness of spirit, a consciousness of weakness, a dependence on their parents' care, an obedience to their commands, and a submission to their will. Now these must be the dispositions of all who would be numbered with Christ's people here, or be partakers with them in a better world: nor can any thing but a resemblance to children in these respects warrant any person to believe himself in a state of favour with God. The declaration in our text is as strong and clear as words can make it. The very entrance into Christ's kingdom is by this door: it is low, and we must stoop; it is narrow, and we must be little in our own estimation, before we can by any means find admission within it: there is no space allowed for the cumbrous ornaments of worldly wisdom, of moral goodness, of human

power; we must enter naked and divested of them all—divested, I mean, in our own apprehension and conceit; and must be willing to take “Christ as our wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification, and redemption.” This is humiliating, it is true; but it must be done; and, if we will not submit to it, we can never enter into the kingdom of heaven: “the wise must become fools^f,” the pure polluted^g, the righteous guilty^h *in their own estimation*, before Christ can be valued, or his salvation desired. We say not that a person must *commit wickedness* in order to fit himself for Christ’s kingdom; God forbid: but he must renounce every degree of self-conceit, self-dependence, self-seeking, and self-applause; and, “whatever he had which once he accounted gain, must now be considered by him as loss for Christ.”

O that all were thus divested of self, and made willing to seek their all in Christ! Let parents condescend to learn from their little children what dispositions they themselves should cultivate towards their heavenly Father; and bear in mind, that their highest perfection is, to be brought to a willing and habitual resemblance to that instructive emblem.]

2. By example—

[“He took the little children up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them.” What amazing condescension! *How amiable in itself*, so to notice those, who could be so little conscious of his love. *How conciliatory to the parents*, whose hearts were more open to impression from the kindness shewn to their offspring, than from any favour that could be conferred upon themselves! *How encouraging to the children*, whose parents would not fail to remind them often that *they* had been thus highly honoured, to be embraced in the Saviour’s bosom, and to receive his heavenly blessing! Methinks, this very circumstance would operate upon them through life to devote themselves unto the Lord Jesus Christ, and to “cleave unto him with full purpose of heart.” In a word, *how edifying to all!* To *parents*, it shewed what their chief desire for their children should be, namely, to bring them to the knowledge of him, and to the enjoyment of his salvation. To *ministers*, it spoke with peculiar emphasis, that they should attend to the lambs of their flock, and consider neither the meanest nor the weakest of the people as beneath their notice: however laborious their occupations might be, they should reserve some portion of their time for the instruction of babes. To *all his believing people* also, whether men or women, it shewed how acceptable a service they would perform, if they laboured to instruct the rising generation. If he himself did not overlook

^f 1 Cor. iv. 10.

^g Job ix. 20, 21, 30, 31.

^h Rom. iii. 19.

the existence of little faith, or “despise the day of small things,” or disdain to sow what could not be reaped for many years, well may his people cultivate the same benevolence, and exert themselves according to their measure in the same glorious cause.]

From this subject we may SEE,

1. How thankful ought children to be to their instructorsⁱ!

[To you who are instructed from Sabbath to Sabbath it appears, that the teaching of you to read is the great object which your instructors have in view: but this is by no means the case: they desire to perform the same kind office for you which the parents in our text performed for their children; they would bring you to Christ, that you may be received into his bosom, and be made partakers of his blessing. For this end they pray for you in secret, that God may render their labours effectual for your eternal good: and whilst they are instructing you, they often put up a silent prayer to Him who seeth the desire of their hearts; and they actually put you, as it were, into the Saviour’s hands, saying, ‘Lord, give thy blessing to this dear child!’ Let me then entreat you to have the same end in view, and to seek for yourselves his blessing upon your souls.]

2. What reason have they to be ashamed who would keep men from Christ!

[The Disciples had some reason for discouraging the bringing of infants to Christ; but what reason have they who would deter grown persons from coming to him! Shall it be thought that there are few, if any, who would act so wicked a part? Alas! there are many: for, what is the tendency of that derision with which religion is treated, and of that opposition which is almost universally made to those who are zealous in its cause? Surely, if our Lord was “*much displeased*” with his Disciples, who really meant well, it is no little displeasure that he will manifest against the wilful despisers of his Gospel — — — We commend to their attention a fore-cited passage^k, and pray God that they may never know the force of it by their own experience.]

3. What encouragement have we all to apply to Christ for ourselves!

[If our blessed Lord was so condescending unto infants, what will he not be to those who come to him with understanding

ⁱ This is proper to be noticed especially where there are *Sunday Schools*. This is also a fit subject for a *Baptism*.

^k Matt. xviii. 6.

hearts? Will he put any obstacles in *their* way? Has he not said, that "those who come unto him he will in no wise cast out?" Let not any then dishonour him by doubts and fears, as though he would not be gracious unto them: let not any sense of their own unworthiness discourage them: but let them rather remember, that the more lowly they are in their own eyes, the more amiable they will be in his; and the more empty they are in themselves, the more certainly shall they be "filled out of his fulness."]

MCCCCXXXIX.

THE RICH YOUTH FORSAKING CHRIST.

Mark x. 21, 22. *Then Jesus beholding him, loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me. And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions.*

IT is never known what a man is, till he is tried. Those who most dread a conflict, may approve themselves steadfast when once they are actually engaged in it; and those who are most confident of their own prowess, may betray the greatest timidity. The eagerness of Peter to walk upon the waves, and his vehement protestations of fidelity to his Master, might have gained him a reputation for invincible firmness, had he not been left to prove by actual experiment the weakness and inefficacy of his resolutions. The man who engaged to follow Jesus whithersoever he might go, began to waver, as soon as he was informed that Jesus had not a place where to lay his head. Thus the young man in our text might have passed for the most excellent of characters, had he not been brought to the touchstone, and suffered to manifest the real dispositions of his soul. But the command which Jesus gave him, was a trial which he could not stand, and an ordeal which he could not pass.

In elucidating his conduct, we shall consider,

I. The injunction given him—

[We confess that the command was *difficult* to be obeyed. If we contemplate his youth, his rank (a ruler,) his opulence; if we contemplate the sentiments he must have imbibed, the

hopes he must have entertained, the habits he must have formed, the change proposed to him must have been irksome and arduous in the extreme. To exchange wealth for poverty, ease for trouble, homage for contempt, *this* was hard indeed for flesh and blood; nor could any thing but Almighty grace qualify him for such a work.

Yet, though difficult, the command was *not unreasonable*. From whom had he received his wealth; or, who but God, had made him to differ? And had not God a right to recall what he had only *lent*? Had he any cause to complain, if God, who for a time had elevated him above his fellow-creatures, should afterwards reduce him to a level with them? Had not God as much right to disperse his wealth among the poor, as he before had to accumulate it upon one single man? Besides, when the sacrifice, which he was called to make, would contribute so much to the comfort of his fellow-creatures; and when it would ultimately return with a rich and abundant recompence into his own bosom; was it to be deemed unreasonable? Is it not what every merchant in the universe is glad to do, to sacrifice the temporary possession of his treasure, in the hope and prospect of far richer treasures in return?

Nor was it *singular*. This youth gloried in being a descendant of Abraham, who was called out from his country and kindred, to go, he knew not whither; to subsist, he knew not how. With this fact he was well acquainted; and he knew that Abraham never found reason to repent of his self-denying obedience. Moreover, he had at this moment before his eyes persons who had obeyed a similar call, and who could say, "Lo, we *have left* all, and followed thee." And, in fact, though we are not all called to precisely the same *act* of obedience, we are all called to manifest that *spirit*, which would ensure the performance of that act, if in the course of Providence we were called to it. Thus also, *in the latter part of the injunction*, there was nothing unreasonable, or singular. He came to our Lord for instruction; and our Lord bade him to become a stated attendant on his ministry. He would, doubtless, in the execution of this duty, have a cross to bear: but had not all his Disciples the same cross? and had not Jesus a far heavier cross than any, or than all together? yea, had he not come from heaven on purpose to bear it for them? Was it unreasonable then that the disciple should be as the master, and the servant as his lord?

If he was really desirous of obtaining salvation, there was nothing in the injunction given him, which did not deserve a cheerful and unreserved compliance.]

But we shall have still clearer views of this subject, if we consider,

II. The peculiar reasons for that injunction—

Our blessed Lord, in his reply to the young man, designed,

1. To discover to him the depravity of his own heart—

[Because the youth had never been guilty of any notorious breach of the commandments, he was ready to imagine that he had no ground for humiliation and contrition. Our Lord, if he had pleased, might have opened to him the spirituality of the law; and have shewn him that he was mistaken in supposing that he had “kept all the commandments from his youth up:” but he took a shorter and more convincing method: he gave him a specific charge, to obey which was his indispensable duty: by his reluctance to obey that, our Lord shewed him, that his heart was not so much in unison with the law of God as he imagined; yea, that if duty and interest should stand in competition with each other, *he* would prove as great a rebel as more flagrant transgressors.

Thus our Lord sought to counteract his pride and self-complacency, by leading him to manifest the worldliness and carnality of his heart.]

2. To wean him from self-confidence and self-dependence—

[By that question which the young man so confidently asked, “What lack I yet?” we are led to suspect, that, as he saw no defects in his obedience, so he saw no ground to doubt his acceptance with God *on account of* his obedience. The drift of his original question, “What shall I do, that I may inherit eternal life?” seems to have been to this effect: ‘Master, I perceive that thou art a teacher sent from God, and that thou requirest of us something different from what I have been accustomed to hear or practise: be so kind therefore as to inform me what it is; for I would not willingly omit any thing, whereby I may secure the salvation of my soul.’ In this view of his question, he wanted to substantiate more fully, and establish more firmly, his claim to eternal life on the footing of his own obedience. Against this fatal error our Lord’s injunction was strongly directed: it was an axe laid to the root of his self-righteousness: and it had a most powerful tendency to convince the youth, that all his hopes were built on a foundation of sand.]

3. To lead him to the salvation provided for him in the Gospel—

[Our Lord might have preached the Gospel to him more fully, and informed him, that salvation was to be obtained only

by faith in *him*, as “the way, the truth, and the life.” But the time was not yet arrived for the full disclosure of Gospel truth. It was at present but sparingly promulgated. Besides, if our Lord had thus plainly declared the way of salvation, there is reason to think, that the young man would either have rejected the truth without further inquiry, or embraced it without a due preparation of soul for it; in either of which cases he would miss the end which he was solicitous to attain. The best way therefore to lead him to salvation, was, to shew him his need of it; that so he might enter upon a profession of it with all the zeal and gratitude that would be necessary for his establishment in the faith.]

But, while we thus vindicate the injunction given him, we cannot but lament,

III. The effect it produced upon him—

Instead of operating in the manner that our Saviour wished,

1. It filled him with grief—

[“He was sad at that saying.” But what made him “sad?” Was he grieved and ashamed on account of his backwardness to obey it? That would have been a hopeful sign, and would probably have issued in his conversion to God. But alas! he was grieved at the strictness of the precept. “He had great possessions,” and could not prevail upon himself to part with them. His riches were his idol; and of more estimation, in his eyes, than any treasure in heaven. Had he been called to sacrifice *a part* of his property, he would probably have acquiesced in the appointment: but to bereave himself of *all*, to reduce himself to a state of poverty, *this* was a requisition which he could not comply with.

Such is the effect of the Gospel upon many at this time: they would gladly embrace it, and would make some sacrifices to obtain its blessings: but to renounce the world, to mortify their lusts, to turn their backs upon all that is pleasing to flesh and blood, and to bring upon themselves nothing but contempt and persecution from their dearest friends and relatives, appears to them too great a sacrifice, and they hope to get to heaven upon easier terms. Thus between a sense of their duty, and an aversion to perform it, the only effect of the Gospel is to render them unhappy.]

2. It determined him to forsake Christ altogether—

[“He went away grieved.” Much as he revered the Lord Jesus, and wished to partake of his salvation, he could not continue with him on such terms as these. The price was too great for him to pay; and therefore he turned his back upon him.

Unhappy youth! How much better had it been for him, if he had been born in a low estate! What a curse to him were his riches, which stood between him and the Saviour of the world! Who is not ready to weep over him, when he reflects upon the fatal effects of that decision? Who that sees that hopeful character turning his back upon his Divine Instructor, giving up all hopes of heaven, and determinately preferring a present portion, does not tremble, lest he himself should be left to make the same foolish choice?]

INFER—

1. How dangerous is the state of many, who yet think themselves safe!

[If we had seen that youth (regardless of the follies which persons of his age and condition too generally prosecute) coming in so respectful a manner to the despised Nazarene; “kneeling before him” with profoundest reverence; addressing him in such terms, and such an emphatic way, as to intimate that he thought Jesus to be more than human; if we had seen him declaring confidently, that, to the best of his knowledge, he had persevered in an uniform obedience to all the commandments, and was ready to fulfil any duty that could be pointed out to him; above all, if we had seen Jesus himself struck with his amiable deportment, and “loving him” for his excellent qualities; who amongst us would not have been disposed to envy that youth his prospects of immortality and glory? Yet, behold, he came short of heaven! There was “*one* thing he lacked;” and for that one thing (as far as we are informed) he perished for ever. O that the moral, the sober, the amiable (of both sexes), would consider this, and take warning from his example! The thing he lacked, was, a determination to forsake all for Christ. And is not this lacking in many amongst ourselves? Are there not many, whom, for their amiable qualities, one cannot but love, who yet, if they must part with *all*, or *Christ*, would hold fast their present portion? O, beloved, let this matter be duly weighed; and never imagine that you are in the way to heaven, till you can “count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus.”]

2. How awful is the condition of those who have no concern for their souls!

[Multitudes there are, in this and every other place, whose lives have been far from moral; who, instead of having kept all the commandments from their earliest infancy, have violated them in many flagrant instances; and who never came to Jesus with an unfeigned desire to receive instruction about the way to heaven. What then must be *their* state? We

appeal to themselves, If this amiable youth was not saved, how can you imagine that salvation belongs to you, who have not done half so much for it as this perishing youth? Methinks, this one example speaks more forcibly to you than ten thousand arguments. You must be wilfully blind, if you do not see how deplorable is your condition, and how certain your ruin, if you continue in your present state. Be persuaded, that it is not so easy a matter to get to heaven. You must have a real concern about your souls: the attainment of heaven must be paramount to every other consideration. If you will gain heaven at all, you must “take it by the holy violence” of prayer and faith.]

3. How blessed are they whose hearts are right with God!

[They may indeed be exercised with great trials: they may be called to relinquish much of their worldly interests; to suffer much reproach; and to bear many a heavy cross. But the “heavenly treasure” will richly repay for all: yea, the very prospect of it is a sufficient compensation for all that we can endure. Could we but consult this unhappy youth, and ask him what he *now* thinks of his past conduct, how would he condemn his conduct, how would he deplore his folly! If, on the contrary, we could ask of Paul what views he now had of his conduct in “suffering the loss of all things” for Christ’s sake; would he not confirm his former declarations? would he not affirm more strongly than ever, that all things were dung and dross in comparison of Christ? Let us then take joyfully the loss of man’s esteem, and the spoiling of our goods: let the views and prospects of glory cheer us when dejected, and animate us when faint. We have reason to expect, that “the more our afflictions abound for Christ’s sake, the more our consolations also shall abound through Christ:” and we are sure, that, “if we suffer with Christ, we shall also be glorified together.”]^a

^a If the Sermon on the three following verses be not preached in connexion with this, the third INFERENCE should be, *How little to be desired are great riches!* This is the reflection which our Lord himself makes upon it; and therefore it would be very improper to omit it here, except with a view to a fuller and distinct consideration of that subject.

MCCCCXL.

THE DANGER OF RICHES.

Mark x. 23—25. *And Jesus looked round about, and saith unto his disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into*

the kingdom of God! And the Disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

IN the perusal of history, it is desirable not merely to treasure up facts in our minds, but to deduce from them such observations as shall increase our stock of practical and useful knowledge. It will be to little purpose to have our memory stored with events, unless our judgment be matured by suitable reflections upon them. In reference to the sacred history, this remark is still more obvious and important. Very little benefit would accrue to a person from knowing, that a rich young man had turned away from Christ, because he disliked the directions which our Lord had given him. If we would derive any material instruction from this event, we should consider what aspect it has upon the manners of men in general: we should, after the example which our Lord himself has set us, contemplate the effects which wealth generally produces on those who possess it, and the obstacles which it lays in our way to the kingdom of heaven.

In confirmation of our Lord's reflection, we shall endeavour to shew, whence it is that "it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God."

I. It is difficult for a person to have riches, and not to *love* them—

Riches almost universally fascinate the minds of men—

[Persons of opulence see what respect their wealth procures for them; that they are objects of admiration and envy to all around them; and that, by means of their money, they can obtain all the comforts and luxuries of life. Hence they are ready to conceive that riches are really good, and almost necessarily conducive to the happiness of those who possess them. Under this idea, their affections are easily attracted towards them, and they are ready to congratulate themselves on their own peculiarly favoured lot. Hence that caution

of the Psalmist's, "If riches increase, set not your heart upon them."]

But in proportion as they engage our hearts, they obstruct our way to heaven—

[We are commanded "not to set our affections on things below, but on things above." This prohibition extends to riches, and to every thing else that fascinates the carnal mind. The reason of it is moreover assigned by God himself, namely, that the love of this world neither proceeds from him, nor leads to him, but is absolutely incompatible with real love to him^a. Let it only then be acknowledged, that the love of God is necessary to the attainment or enjoyment of heaven; and then it will follow, that the person, who loves his riches, cannot attain heaven; nor could he enjoy it, even if he were admitted there: he has in his bosom an object that rivals God: and God is a jealous God, who will never accept a divided heart. "We never can serve God and Mammon." If "our treasure be on earth, our heart will be there also:" and if it be looked to as the source of our happiness, "Woe unto us; for we have received our consolation."]

II. It is difficult for a person to have riches, and not *be puffed up by them*—

Pride is too generally an attendant on riches—

[As great respect is paid to riches, the people who possess them are apt to think that they deserve it. They arrogate it to themselves; they are offended, if any persons refuse to gratify them with the homage which they claim. They shew in their look, their dress, their manner of speaking, yea, in their very gait, they "think themselves to be somebody." They expect their wishes to be consulted, and their judgment to be followed. They are impatient of contradiction. They do not like, either in public or in private, to be told of their faults. If a minister deal faithfully with their consciences, they rather condemn *him* for (what they will call) his rudeness or harshness, than *themselves* for their departure from God. How commonly this disposition springs from riches, we may judge from that direction which is given to ministers; "Charge them who are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded^b."]

And this also, if indulged, will exclude us from heaven—

["Pride was not made for man:" "The proud in heart are an abomination to the Lord:" whoever he be, "God will

^a 1 John ii. 15, 16.

^b 1 Tim. vi. 17.

certainly abase him." Not Hezekiah himself shall escape without deep humiliation^c; nor even then, without severe chastisements^d. If we be "lifted up with pride, (whatever be the occasion,) we shall fall into the condemnation of the devil." The characteristic mark of every true Christian, and of all that shall be admitted into heaven, is humility; "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Worldly poverty is not more opposite to wealth, than spiritual poverty is to pride. The true Christian will "prefer others in honour before himself," and account himself, "less than the least of all saints." But, inasmuch as wealth has a directly opposite tendency, it is hostile to the interests of Christianity, and to the salvation of all who possess it.]

III. It is difficult for a person to have riches, and not *be corrupted by them*—

Whatever a corrupt heart can desire, is attainable through riches—

[Wealth opens a way for all manner of sensuality and self-indulgence: and, at the same time that it gives us facilities for gratifying our evil inclinations, it leads us into such habits as greatly dispose us to sin. A luxurious table draws us to intemperance; intemperance inflames our passions; and affluence opens an easy way to the indulgence of them. The rich even think that they are, in a measure, licensed to commit iniquity: and, in their eyes, intemperance and lewdness are, at the most, no more than venial follies, which they can commit without shame, and look back upon without remorse.

But where riches do not produce this effect, they still exceedingly corrupt the soul. They habituate us to easy indolent habits, that are very contrary to those self-denying exercises in which the Christian should be employed. They lead us into the company of those whose minds are least spiritual, and from whose conversation and example we can derive least profit. They induce parents to seek connexions for their children rather among the opulent than among the good. They not unfrequently draw persons into great speculations, which fill them with anxiety, and encumber them with oppressive cares. Strange as it may seem, they often prove incentives to avarice, as well as to prodigality, and to an oppression of others, as well as to the gratifying of ourselves. Hence, whenever the term "lucre" is mentioned in the New Testament, the term "filthy" is invariably associated with it.]

And the more our corruptions are indulged, the more certain we are of perishing in final ruin—

^c 2 Chron. xxxii. 25, 26.

^d Isai. xxxix. 4—7.

[We are warned, that “to be carnally-minded is death:” and the final ruin of a very large portion of those who hear the Gospel is ascribed to “the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches, which choke the word that they hear, and render it unfruitful.” “The love of money,” we are told, “is the root of all evil;” and “they who even desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.” Inasmuch as riches induce us principally to mind earthly things, they make us enemies of the cross of Christ, and bring us to destruction as our end.”]

IV. It is difficult to have riches, and not *trust in* them—

Wealth, whilst it gains our affections, is apt to become also a ground of our confidence—

[“The rich man’s wealth,” says Solomon, “is his strong city.” We are apt to rely upon it, as a source both of present and future happiness. We seem, when possessed of riches, to be out of the reach of harm. When poor, we more habitually and more sensibly feel our dependence on Providence; but, when rich, we think we have no need of religion to make us happy, or of God to provide for us: we are ready to say, like the Rich Man in the Gospel, “Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.” In like manner, we think that we have no reason to fear about the future world. We are ready to imagine, that God will pay the same deference to wealth as our fellow-creatures do. We have no conception that a rich man, unless he has been guilty of some peculiarly enormous crimes, can be cast into hell. It is in vain that we read of “the Rich Man lifting up his eyes in torments:” we take for granted, that a rich man, if he have been tolerably decent in his deportment, must of necessity go to heaven: and a rich man will not endure, for the most part, to have a doubt of his future happiness suggested to him. It is not without reason, therefore, that St. Paul says, “Charge them that are rich in this world, that they trust not in uncertain riches.”]

But to place our confidence in any thing but God, is certain ruin—

[God denounces a “curse on those who make flesh their arm;” and he represents their conduct as “a departure of their hearts from him.” And Job informs us, that “the saying to the gold, Thou art my confidence, is an iniquity to be punished by the Judge, and a denial of the God that is above.”]

V. It is difficult to have riches, and not *cleave to them in preference to Christ*—

This is the point more especially referred to in the text itself—

[The reason assigned for the young man's forsaking Christ was, that he had great possessions: and hence our Lord's reflection on the almost insurmountable difficulties which riches interpose in our way to heaven. The fact is, that though every one is not called to renounce his riches precisely in the same way that this opulent ruler was, every one is required to sit loose to them, and to be willing to renounce them all, whenever they shall stand in competition with his duty to God. And there is no man, who is not called to make some sacrifices for Christ. Now a rich man's reputation is exceedingly dear to him; and his interests in the world appear to him of almost incalculable importance: and, if he be called to renounce them all, the sacrifice appears too great to be endured. He hopes he shall find out an easier way to heaven; and chooses rather to risk the salvation of his soul, than to subject himself to such grievous trials in order to obtain it. Even those who have tasted somewhat of the sweetness of religion are sometimes drawn away, like Demas; and forsake their Saviour from love to this present world.]

But in choosing our portion now, we choose for eternity—

["We must reap according to what we sow: he that soweth to the flesh must, of the flesh, reap corruption." We must "part with all if we would have the pearl of great price." "If we do not forsake all for Christ, we cannot be his disciples." "We must count all things but loss for him." "We must hate father and mother, and houses and lands, yea and our lives also, for his sake." "If we will not lose our lives for him here, we never can find life in the eternal world."]

INFER—

1. How little true faith is there in the world!

[Where is the man, who, if offered great riches, would be afraid to accept them, lest they should impede his way to heaven? or, when congratulated on his attainment of wealth, would damp the ardour of his friends by entreating rather an interest in their prayers, than that the newly-acquired riches might not corrupt and destroy his soul? Where is the man possessed of riches, who does not think his way to heaven as easy as that of any other person? In short, where is the person who does not say in his heart, 'Give me riches: I will run the risk of their doing me any harm: I have no doubt I shall

get to heaven with them as easily as without them?' But would it be thus, if we really believed the words of our blessed Lord? Alas! even the Apostles themselves scarcely knew how to receive so hard a saying: we are told, that they were "astonished out of measure." But it becomes us to credit the assertion of Him who could not err, and would not deceive.]

2. What reason have the poor to be satisfied with their lot!

[If rich men have the advantage of them with respect to this world, the poor have incomparably better prospects with respect to the world to come. These are free and unincumbered, and ready, as it were, to run the race that is set before them; while the others are impeded by their lusts as with flowing garments, and have their "feet laden with thick clay." These in multitudes flock to heaven, "as doves to their windows," whilst very few of the others ever attain the heavenly prize^e. It must not however be imagined that the poor will be saved, *because* they are poor; any more than the rich will perish, *because* they are rich. All must run, if they would obtain the prize. He who regards the salvation of his soul as "the one thing needful," shall be saved, whether rich or poor; and he who does not, will perish. Neither the riches of the one, nor the poverty of the other, will avail him any thing. The only inquiry will be, Who among them was "rich towards God?" and their several attainments in real piety will be the only ground of distinction between them. Yet, inasmuch as a state of poverty renders us less exposed to temptation than wealth, it may well be endured with patience, and improved with gratitude. Even, if we have (through misfortunes of any kind) experienced a transition from wealth to poverty, we may well be reconciled to the change (however painful it may be to flesh and blood); since the loss we sustain may be in fact our greatest advantage: we have lost perhaps the cargo, which, if suffered to continue on board, would utterly have sunk the ship.]

3. How thankful should we be that "help is laid on One that is mighty!"

[When the Apostles exclaimed, "Who then can be saved?" they were consoled with the declaration, that "all things were possible with God." Now this is our comfort, that all fulness is treasured up for us in Christ; and that "he is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him." None then need despair: however great our temptations may be, "He

^e 1 Cor. i. 26—28. Jam. ii. 5.

knoweth how to deliver the godly out of them," and to "preserve them blameless unto his heavenly kingdom." He can uphold a Joseph, a David, and a Daniel, amidst all the splendour of courts, as well as under the pressure of the heaviest trials. Let all then put their trust in Jesus, even in that almighty Saviour, whose grace is sufficient for them, and through whose strengthening communications they shall be able to do all things: so shall Abraham the rich and prosperous, and Lazarus the poor and indigent, rejoice together in God's kingdom for ever and ever.]

MCCCCXLI.

THE REWARD OF THOSE WHO SUFFER FOR CHRIST.

Mark x. 28—30. *Then Peter began to say unto him, Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee. And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the Gospel's, but he shall receive an hundred-fold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come, eternal life.*

THROUGH the corruption of our nature, the defects of others are apt to raise us in our own estimation, and to afford us occasion for self-applause. This ought not to be: for the faults of others should be lamented, no less than our own, because they are injurious to the souls of men: and, if we ourselves are free from those faults, we have reason to glorify God for his grace, which alone has made us to differ from others. We have in the context a lamentable instance of human weakness; a young man, of exemplary habits, who, on being required to sell all that he had, and to give it to the poor, and follow Christ, went away sorrowful; grieved to part with Christ, but preferring his wealth before him. Peter beholding this, began to reflect with complacency on the different conduct which he, and his fellow-Apostles, had pursued: they had left all for Christ: and, as our Lord had told the young man, that he, if he complied with his counsel, should "have treasure in heaven," Peter asked, what recompence should be made to him and his brethren for the sacrifices which

they had made in the cause of Christ; “We have forsaken all, and followed thee: what shall *we* have therefore^a?”

THIS INQUIRY is the first thing for our present consideration—

[Though the Apostles were poor, their ALL was as much to them, as it would have been if they had been richer: nor can we doubt, but that the surrender of it was as acceptable to God, as if the sacrifice had been more costly: “it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not^b.” This sacrifice was required of them, and they had offered it without hesitation; they could truly say, they “had left all for Christ;” and they had thereby approved themselves worthy of their descent from him, who, at God’s command, had offered his only son Isaac upon the altar. Nor are we to imagine that the duty was peculiar to *them*: it is as much our duty, as it was theirs, to leave all for Christ. We are not indeed called, like the Apostles, to forsake our worldly callings in order to wait as stated attendants on our Lord: we are rather to “abide in our callings wherein we are called:” but we must *be willing* to sacrifice every thing for Christ, and must *actually* sacrifice every thing that stands in competition with him: in this respect the whole Christian world are called to the same exercise of faith and self-denial as the Apostles were; every thing sinful must be mortified; and even the most innocent and necessary things must be given up, rather than that we should be drawn by them to the commission of any one sin, or to the neglect of any one duty: we must “*hate* father and mother, and even our own lives also, in comparison of Christ^c.”

Under such circumstances Peter’s inquiry seems not unreasonable: for if we are to surrender up every thing to and for Christ, we may well ask, ‘What shall I gain by this? or, What recompence shall I obtain?’ It is not to be expected that God will call us to such trials, and not remunerate us for our fidelity to him. It is true, we can never look for a reward *of debt*; but a reward *of grace* we may expect, and *that* too in proportion to the sacrifices we make, the sufferings we endure, and the services we perform. We are not at liberty to make bargains, as it were, with the Almighty, and to stipulate for so much wages in return for so much service: we must rather enter voluntarily into his service, and cheerfully give up all for him: but *after having made the needful sacrifices*, we may inquire into the promised recompence of reward. We must, like Abraham, “go out from our country and our kindred, not knowing whither we go^d;” and must trust in God to make all

^a See Matt. xix. 27.

^b 2 Cor. viii. 12.

^c Luke xiv. 26.

^d Heb. xi. 8.

necessary provision for us: and, if he had not specified any thing in his word, we should be contented to continue ignorant of the recompence that he will assign us: but, as he has been pleased to make specific promises to those who trust in him, we cannot do wrong in endeavouring to ascertain their import and extent.]

THE ANSWER OF OUR LORD to this inquiry is the next point to be noticed by us—

[St. Matthew records more of our Lord's answer than either of the other Evangelists. He mentions a part which seems more immediately applicable to the Apostles themselves, who, "*in the regeneration,*" that is, in the day when "God will make all things new," and "there shall be new heavens and a new earth," and "when our Lord shall come in his glory to judge the world," shall be honoured above all other men, being, as it were, assessors with Christ in the Judgment, and having their word as the law by which "the twelve tribes of Israel," and the whole world, shall be judged^e. St. Mark records that only which was of general use; but still he gives all the satisfaction that the most bereaved and destitute person can desire.

There is a *present* recompence which all who suffer loss for Christ shall receive; and *that* too exceedingly beyond any loss they can possibly sustain. It is taken for granted that they may lose the affection of all their most endeared relatives for their attachment to the Gospel; and that they may be deprived of all that they possess in the world: but God will often send them such supplies in another way, that they shall in reality sustain no loss at all: but, if he does not recompense them in this way, he will give them "*contentment,* which with godliness is great gain;" and such an *increased enjoyment* of their slender pittance, as shall be far sweeter than all the delicacies upon earth. He will "shed abroad his love in their hearts," and, under the loss of earthly parents, and an earthly portion, will enable them to call *him*, Father, and to view heaven itself as their inheritance. Let any one who has experienced these consolations, say, Whether they be not "*a hundred fold*" greater than all that they ever derived from the possession of earthly comforts even in their richest abundance? — — —

But, besides this, there is a *future* recompence, even "eternal life," which shall assuredly be given to all who suffer for Christ in this world: "If we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him," and "be glorified together," and have "a weight of glory proportioned" to the trials we endure, and to the graces which we exercise, in his service. But who can

^e Matt. xix. 28.

estimate the value of *that* recompence? — — — Suffice it to say, that the veracity of God is pledged for the bestowment of it, and that the blessedness conferred shall exist, as long as God himself exists.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who hesitate about leaving all for Christ—

[Does a moment's hesitation become you? Think of your Lord and Saviour: did he hesitate, when an offer was made him to redeem your souls? Did he account the conditions hard, when he had your everlasting salvation in view? No: he gladly left the bosom of his Father, and assumed our nature, and bore our curse, that he might redeem our souls from death and hell^f. Do you then hesitate to make any sacrifice for him? Look at Paul; was he intimidated? did he account any thing too much to do or suffer for his Lord^g? Look at Moses: can you be called to sacrifice more than he? "He esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt^h." Think not to have an interest in Christ on any lower terms: You must, *in heart and affection*, forsake all, if you would be his disciplesⁱ. The Rich Youth in the Gospel would not accede to these terms: but do you commend him? Do you not look upon him with pity? Do you not think he would change his mind now, if the offer were again made him? O be wise in time! "buy the truth, and sell it not:" be willing to "sell all that you have for that treasure which is hid in the Gospel, and for that pearl of great price^k." If, like Amaziah, you reply, "What shall I do for all the talents I shall sacrifice?" I answer with the prophet, "The Lord is able to give thee much more^l." In fact, your gain will exceed all calculation. If you were a merchant, you would gladly embrace an opportunity of making ten or twenty per cent. of your money, though the return should not be absolutely certain; but here you are promised *ten thousand per cent.* and it is assured to you by the veracity of God himself. Only "have faith in God," and all the blessings of "the upper and nether springs," of time and of eternity, are yours.]

2. Those who, like the Apostles, have left all for him—

[Whatever your losses or sufferings may have been, I congratulate you from my heart: yea, God himself congratulates

^f Compare Ps. xl. 6—8. with Phil. ii. 6—8.

^g Compare Acts xx. 24. and xxi. 13. with Phil. ii. 17. and iii. 7, 8.

^h Heb. xi. 24—26.

ⁱ Luke xiv. 33.

^k Matt. xiii. 44—46.

^l 2 Chron. xxv. 9.

you^m. And I confidently put the question to you, Has any one of you been ever disappointed of his hope? Have you ever been a loser by serving the Lord? Has he not made up to you in spiritual things, what you have sacrificed for him in worldly things? In the pursuit of earthly gratifications you have often paid too dearly for your enjoyments; but have you ever had reason to regret the price you have paid for the maintenance of a good conscience, and for the benefits of the Gospel? After having counted the cost yourself, have you a friend in the world whom you would dissuade from treading in your steps? You still experience "persecutions;" for they are *a part of the Promise*, if I may so speak: but do you find them so great a drawback upon your happiness, as you once expected? Is an opprobrious name, or the loss of worldly interests, so great a matter as you once imagined? Shew then by your steadfastness, that, "in God's favour is life;" and that though "you have nothing else, you really possess all things." *To those who are preparing for the ministry*, these thoughts are peculiarly important: for this discipline is often sent, in order to prepare you for the service of the sanctuary. You are to stand in the front of the battle: you are to be examples to the flock: and it is by such exercises that you are to be fitted for your work, and to bring down a blessing on your future laboursⁿ. Still it is not of you only that these sacrifices are required; nor are you alone to receive the rich compensation that will be awarded for them. This duty is the duty of all; this happiness is the happiness of all: to all therefore, without exception, I would say, "Be faithful unto death, and God will give you a crown of life."]

^m Matt. v. 10—12. 1 Pet. iv. 12—14. Jam. i. 2—4, 12.

ⁿ Deut. xxxiii. 9—11.

MCCCCXLII.

THE AMBITION OF JAMES AND JOHN REPROVED.

Mark x. 35—40. *And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come unto him, saying, Master, we would that thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall desire. And he said unto them, What would ye that I should do for you? They said unto him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory. But Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? And they say unto him, We can. And Jesus said unto them, Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal*

shall ye be baptized: but to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared.

THERE is a fund of instruction in the Scriptures, which the superficial reader entirely overlooks. A thousand little circumstances that are incidentally mentioned in them, serve to confirm each other for the establishment of our faith^a; whilst others, that are not mentioned at all, but only supplied by the attentive reader, afford lessons of the greatest importance for the regulation of our conduct. To administer reproof well, is an art exceeding rare and difficult to be attained. When called to attempt it, we in general either pass over the fault so slightly, as to convey no adequate idea of its malignity; or insist upon it so strongly, as to incense, rather than conciliate, the offending person: taking no notice of what we might approve, we are apt to look only at what we disapprove; and to search out occasion for blame, even beyond what the occasion requires. But, instead of this, we should be forward to applaud what is good in the spirit of any person, when we cannot commend the terms in which he speaks; or to put a favourable construction on the terms he uses, when we are constrained to shew our disapprobation of his spirit. Our Lord has set us an example in this respect, which well deserves our imitation. Two of his Disciples, James and John, had come to him with a request, which argued lamentable ignorance and a highly culpable ambition. But how did our Lord correct their folly? Did he expatiate upon their fault, and aggravate it to the uttermost? No: he apparently overlooked it; and annexed to their words a favourable meaning which they were never intended to convey; and then founded on them such instruction as was calculated silently and effectually to counteract the evils of the heart.

In speaking of the request which these Disciples offered to him, we shall notice it,

^a This is beautifully illustrated in that masterly work, Paley's *Horæ Paulinæ*.

I. As it was intended by them—

Whether the idea originated with them or their mother, we do not know: perhaps the Disciples, conscious of the unreasonableness of their desires, had engaged the good offices of their mother, to veil their own ambition: or, possibly, the mother, anxious for the aggrandisement of her family, had urged on her sons to unite in the request: but at all events it is evident, that they hoped by their joint influence certainly to prevail.

Notwithstanding all that our Lord had just said about his sufferings and death, his Disciples still expected that he would establish a temporal kingdom. Though he had spoken of his being crucified, yet, as he had talked also of “rising again the third day,” they conceived, that he spoke only of some transient trials, which would issue in a complete triumph over all his enemies. They remembered that promise which he had very recently given them, that they should at a future period “sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel^b,” and they concluded, that it must relate to some temporal dominion. Emboldened by this, they presumed to ask that they might be invested with the two highest places of dignity and power in his kingdom. Not a thought did they bestow on his sufferings, though described in such awful terms: nothing found any place in their minds, but a hope of speedy elevation to the highest honours upon earth. Nor did they affect only a superiority over the world at large, but even above their own brethren also, even above all the other Apostles; so blind were they to their own incompetency for such a post, and so regardless of their own eternal interests. Consider their request in this view:

1. How unsuitable to their talents!

[What qualifications had they for such an office as that which they solicited? They might be experienced enough as fishermen; but what preparation of mind had they for statesmen, and for the government of an extensive empire? Foolish

^b Matt. xix. 28.

and vain men! Well did our Saviour say to them, “Ye know not what ye ask.”]

2. How repugnant to their best interests!

[They had been called from their wonted employment, in order that they might be at leisure to acquire spiritual knowledge; and would they go and undertake an employment that would fill them with ten thousand times greater cares, even if they were qualified to engage in it? Will a man about to run a race, “load his feet with thick clay?” Yet, notwithstanding their Lord had very recently told them, that it was “easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven;” they sought after wealth and honour as the summit of their felicity. Alas! how awfully had Satan blinded their eyes, and deluded their hearts!]

3. How illustrative of the carnality of the human heart!

[Though only two of the Disciples offered this request, all the others shewed by their indignation that they were under the influence of the same ambition. And indeed what they expressed in words, is more or less the language of all our hearts. We would not perhaps *utter* the sentiment so plainly as they did; but we will *indulge* it. We long for some further advancement in life; somewhat more of honour, or power, or wealth. We do not indeed wish to govern kingdoms; because of that we have no prospect: but as soon as any elevation in the world appears to be within our reach, we instantly find a drawing of heart towards it: all, from the prince to the beggar, are thus affected: and even those, who profess themselves to be disciples of Christ, are still infected with this fatal malady, the love of this world: yes, if the desire of our hearts were as plainly expressed as theirs was, we should be found, with very few exceptions, to resemble those infatuated and misguided men.]

Let us now proceed to notice their request,

II. As it was interpreted by our Lord—

He graciously overlooked the true construction of their words, and affixed a sense to them which they were capable of bearing, and which divested them of a great portion of the evil which they contained: and then he formed his answer, as suited to his own construction of them. He supposed the words to

relate to that kingdom which he was really come to establish in the world; and as importing a desire after the highest proficiency in grace, and the highest elevation in glory. In conformity with this idea, he speaks to them only of *spiritual advancement*, and shews them,

1. The way in which it was to be obtained—

[It is not by a bare request that any person can arrive at eminence in the divine life. The soul is to be disciplined by conflicts, and to be purified by afflictions. Perfect as the Lord Jesus himself was, “he learned obedience by the things which he suffered,” and “was made perfect through sufferings:” and in like manner must all his people be — — — Hence he put the question to them, “Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” As though he had said, ‘You see what bitter trials I endure, that I am overwhelmed even with a sea of troubles^d ;’ and it is ordained that all who will be distinguished either here, or in heaven, must arrive at that distinction by the same path: “they must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of heaven,” and “suffer with me here, if they would be glorified with me in a better world.” This is a solemn and important truth: it has been verified in every age and corner of the world: from righteous Abel to this very hour, every saint has experienced it; and those whose situations have required them to take the lead, have not only borne the brunt of the battle, but frequently have been called to sacrifice their very lives in the cause of Christ. Persecution is a cup which every saint must drink of; and a baptism which every follower of Christ must expect to be baptized with.]

2. The way in which they themselves should obtain it—

[In answer to the question put to them by our Lord, the two Disciples, without any hesitation, affirmed, that they could suffer any extremity for him. But what presumption was this! Still however our blessed Lord would not mark what they said amiss; but, passing over it in silence, told them, that they should all partake of this honour, and be rendered conformable to his image. They had been chosen by him to be his messengers to the world, and to lead others in the way wherein they should go; and therefore it was necessary that they in particular should be patterns of that faith and patience which they were to inculcate upon others. Accordingly, the very first of the Apostles that was put to death for the sake of

^d See 1 Cor. x. 2.

Christ, was James^e: and John was soon imprisoned and beaten for the Gospel's sake^f; and, after a life of many trials, was banished to the Isle of Patmos, where he speaks of himself, at the age of a hundred years, as “a companion in tribulation in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ^g.” Thus he most effectually counteracted their ambitious views, by shewing them, that, instead of honours in this world, they must look for nothing but tribulations and persecutions even unto death.]

3. To what persons it should ultimately be given—

[In the last verse of our text, there are words inserted in italics by our translators, in order to supply what they supposed necessary to complete the sense; but there was no occasion for that addition; and, in fact, it obscures, instead of illustrating, the meaning of the passage. Our Lord tells his Disciples, that the chief places in his kingdom were to be disposed of by him, not according to his own mere arbitrary will, but agreeably to a plan concerted from all eternity between his Father and himself; and that they only would possess the highest place for whom that place had been prepared^h. His words however admit of two distinct meanings; they may be understood as declaring, that his gift of eternal life *is limited by the decrees of God*, or that it *is regulated by the attainments of men*. In either of these views, they contain important instruction. God the Father did, from all eternity, enter into covenant with his Son, and give to him a people, whom he should redeem by his blood, and save by his effectual grace; and on whom he should confer everlasting happiness in heaven. Of these our blessed Lord frequently speaks as of persons given to him by the Father; and he plainly declares elsewhere, that his bestowing of eternal life was limited to themⁱ. But it is equally true, that the degrees of glory which shall be conferred on different persons will be proportioned to their attainments in grace: it is expressly said, that “every man shall receive according to his own labour^k.” Of course, there are higher degrees of glory prepared for those who labour and suffer much for their Lord, and lower degrees for those who are less diligent. The parables of the pounds and of the talents are decisive upon this point. In this sense of the words, our Lord's reply appears to be more pertinent than in the other; for then the import of them will be to this effect: ‘Do not be looking for earthly honour, but for the honour that cometh of God; and be as ambitious for that as you will: only remember, that the degrees of it which you shall obtain,

^e Acts xii. 2.

^f Acts v. 40.

^g Rev. i. 9.

^h The word ἀλλὰ is used in the sense of εἰ μὴ. Compare Mark ix. 8. with Matt. xvii. 8.

ⁱ John xvii. 2, 24.

^k 1 Cor. iii. 8.

depend upon your own exertions for the attainment of it: engage heartily in my service, and expect assuredly at my hands a reward proportioned to your diligence and fidelity.' This is an encouraging consideration to every one of us: the cup we may have to drink of may be bitter at the time; but it shall soon be exchanged for a far different cup, which we shall drink of to all eternity: and though we go through a sea of troubles now, our augmented weight of glory shall abundantly compensate for all the sorrows we have endured.]

Let us LEARN then from hence,

1. What we are to *desire*—

[If we will hear a Prophet, he says, "Seekest thou great things unto thyself? seek them not!" If we will attend to an Apostle, he says, "Set your affections on things above, and not on things on the earth^m." Let us attend to these instructions, and "count all things but loss, that we may win Christ" — — —]

2. What we are to *expect*—

[If we look for honour and acceptance with man, we shall be disappointed. Which of the Prophets, which of the Apostles, was not an object of hatred and persecution to an ungodly world? Who are we then, that we should expect different treatment from them? Let us bear in mind, that "all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution:" and let us be content to bear our cross, in order that we may hereafter receive a crown — — —]

3. What we are to *do*—

[God has appointed to every one of us our work: let us be diligent in the performance of it: "whatsoever our hand findeth to do, let us do it with all our might." But let us be especially careful of the rock which these presumptuous Disciples split upon. When our Lord asked them whether they could "drink of his cup, and be baptized with his baptism," they confidently answered that they could. And how justly they estimated their own powers, they soon shewed, when, upon our Lord's apprehension in the garden, they all forsook him and fled. Thus will it be with us, if we attempt to do any thing in our own strength: we shall soon find that "we have not of ourselves a sufficiency even to think a good thought," much less to do and suffer all the will of God. Our Lord tells us, that "without Him we can do nothing." Let us remember then, that, whilst we engage in his service, we must derive all our strength from him. If we look to him, we need not fear either men or devils: we may set at nought all the menaces of

¹ Jer. xlv. 5.

^m Col. iii. 2.

our most inveterate enemies: a fiery furnace, or a den of lions, need be no object of terror to us; for “our strength shall be according to our day;” and we shall be “enabled both to do all things,” and “to suffer all things, through Christ who strengtheneth us.”]

MCCCCXLIII.

LEGITIMATE AMBITION ILLUSTRATED.

Mark x. 41—45. *And when the ten heard it, they began to be much displeas'd with James and John. But Jesus call'd them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are account'd to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: and whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be serrant of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.*

THE corruption of the heart, like fire in flint, generally lies concealed, till, by a collision with some particular circumstances, it is elicited; and then it comes forth with a power capable of producing the most fatal effects. Till James and John had applied to the Lord Jesus for the two highest places in his kingdom, the other ten Disciples appeared content with any lot that should be assigned them: but when they had reason to apprehend that their more aspiring brethren might be placed above them, they were filled with indignation against them, and were ready to dispute and quarrel with them for precedency. Then they shewed, that they themselves were as much actuated by ambition as the others; and were quite as averse to yield, as the others were anxious to obtain, the highest place of dignity and power. Unconscious of the evil that existed in themselves, they were soon offended at it in others: and it is observable, that we are never more easily offended, than when we behold in others the evil that is predominant in ourselves; so blind are we in our judgment, and so partial in our decisions.

But our blessed Lord gently corrected the errors of his Disciples; he shewed them, that they were

altogether wrong in indulging such a desire after earthly distinctions; and that, if they would affect superiority at all, the only ambition that became them was to excel in works and labours of love. This, which we may call *legitimate ambition*, he illustrated in a way,

I. Of contrast—

The men of this world affect and exercise a lordly authority—

[Kings are rarely content with the measure of power with which they are invested by the laws, but are for the most part desirous of extending their prerogative; and not uncommonly they imagine, that they themselves are exalted, in proportion to the degree of power that they are able to exert. Nor does it in general suffice them to govern their own subjects: they too often wish to interfere with other potentates, and to controul the acts of other sovereigns. The subjugation of other states, is in their eyes a source of enviable aggrandisement: and the greater success they have in prosecuting their ambitious projects, the more restless they become; till at last universal empire is scarce sufficient to satiate their desires. A fear of losing their own possessions, imposes indeed on many a salutary restraint: but where no such ground of fear exists, the tyrannical dispositions of men know no bounds. What the human heart is capable of, may be seen in Nebuchadnezzar; who ordered all the wise men in his dominions to be put to death, because they could not tell him a dream of his, which he himself had forgotten; and again commanded all who would not fall down and worship a golden image which he had set up, to be cast into a fiery furnace: in a word, “all people, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him; whom he would, he slew; and whom he would, he kept alive.”]

The same dispositions are observable also in subordinate governors, and in all who are invested with authority: there is in every one a proneness to extend his power, and to make his own will the rule and reason of action to those around him: and the greater measure of despotism any one is able to exercise, the more he conceives himself to be exalted in the scale of being.]

But the very reverse of this should be the practice of God's people—

[We say not that a Christian may not be a king: (would to God that all the kings upon earth were Christians!) nor do we think it wrong for them to maintain the power assigned them

^a Dan. ii. 12, 13. and iii. 2—7. and v. 19.

by the laws: for they are invested with power by God himself, in order that they may exercise it for their people's good. Nor do we conceive that Christians of an inferior order should decline all offices of trust and power; or that power should not be exercised over the Church of God: for every society must be governed by laws: and it is desirable that the execution of the laws should be entrusted to those who will most consult the glory of God. But this we say, that no man should affect power under an idea that happiness consists in the possession of it, or that he himself is elevated and ennobled by it; nor indeed for any other end, than as it may be instrumental to the advancing of God's honour, and the happiness of mankind. The Christian's must be the very reverse of that which we have seen to be the habit of the world. What worldly men *affect*, he must *despise*: and what they *exact* of others, he must, of his own mind and will, cheerfully *render* to all around him. Instead of wishing to enslave others, he must willingly make himself, so to speak, a slave to others; and account it his highest honour to render services even to the least and meanest of mankind: he must be the minister of *all*, the *servant* of all^b.]

Our Lord proceeded to illustrate this idea further, in a way,

II. Of comparison—

Our blessed Lord has exhibited a perfect pattern for his people—

[He was, in a sense that none other can be, “the Son of Man:” he was, as the Jews themselves understood that name to mean, the Son of God, even God himself^c. Yet “he, though being in the form of God, and counting it not robbery to be equal with God, made himself of no reputation, and took upon himself the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of sinful men:” and, instead of appearing in outward pomp and splendour, and having the great men of the earth in his retinue, he came to minister unto his own rebellious creatures: yea, he waited upon them continually, “going about through all the towns and villages to do good” to their bodies and their souls. On his own immediate Disciples too he waited, condescending even to wash their feet. Nor did he only spend his life in the service of mankind, but at last laid down his life for them, to *ransom* their souls from death and hell. No sacrifice was too great for him to make for their welfare, no suffering too heavy for him to endure. He “bare their infirmities and sorrows” by tender sympathy, and “he bare also their sins in

^b *δούλος* imports a servant who was also his master's property.

^c Luke xxii. 69, 70.

his own body on the tree;" enduring in his own person the curse due to them, that they through him might inherit eternal blessedness^d.]

To resemble him should be the summit of our ambition—

[As to the ends and purposes of his humiliation, he must for ever stand alone: for "no man can redeem his brother, or give to God a ransom for him^e." But we may "bear one another's burthens;" and we ought to do so; for this is the law imposed on us by Christ himself^f: we may consider all our faculties, and time, and wealth, and influence as talents committed to our care, to be improved for God and for the benefit of our fellow-creatures: we may value them all, only as means of doing good: we may make the good of others to be the great business and end of our lives, and study by all possible means to promote the comfort of their bodies, and the salvation of their souls. We may cheerfully submit to sacrifice our ease, our reputation, our liberty, yea, our very lives, in their service: yes; we may, and "we ought to, lay down our lives for the brethren," if by such a sacrifice we may promote their eternal interests^g. Here, I say, is scope for our ambition: nor can we possibly be too ardent in such a career as that. We must not indeed labour even in such a way for the honour that cometh of man: to be aspiring after eminence with a view to man's applause, would vitiate all the actions that we could ever perform, and deprive us of all hope of acceptance with God: but, if we abound in works and labours of love for the honour of God and the good of man, then, the more numerous and self-denying those labours are, the more exalted shall we be in the estimation of God himself; and if we would possess the most distinguished place in his kingdom, *this* is the legitimate and the only method to obtain it. We know that the Apostle Paul was "not a whit behind the very chiefest Apostles:" and the reason was, that "he laboured more abundantly than they all," and rendered both to God and man the greatest measure of difficult and self-denying services^h. In a word, he most resembled his Divine Master: and in proportion as we also resemble Christ, will be our real dignity and honour.]

From this subject we may LEARN,

1. The true nature of Christian morality—

[The generality of Christians have a scheme of morals scarcely elevated beyond the systems which were established

^d 2 Cor. v. 21.

^e Ps. xlix. 7.

^f Gal. vi. 2.

^g 1 John iii. 16.

^h 2 Cor. xi. 5, 22—28.

by heathen philosophers: their morality is a system of pride; and, however wide its circumference, every line of it centres in self. But the morality of the Gospel is founded in humility, and, in every part of it, has respect to the glory of God. It requires us “not to live unto ourselves, but unto him who died for us and rose again” — — — Were this more considered amongst us, we should not hear of persons founding their hopes of acceptance on their morality: for, where is there one who has regulated his life by this standard? If we try our morals by this touchstone, we shall see that the very best of us needs a Saviour, as much as the vilest of the human race — — — Let us remember then what true morality is, and labour to attain its utmost heights.]

2. The diversified uses that we are to make of our Saviour’s death—

[Doubtless the first great use that we are to make of it, is, to trust in it for our reconciliation with God. We all have sold ourselves to sin and Satan, and must all look to his blood as the price paid for our redemption. No other ransom ever was, or ever can be, paid for our souls: in *that* therefore must be all our hope, and trust, and confidence — — — But in the death of Christ we have also an assemblage of every virtue that suffering humanity can exercise. In that we have a pattern of all that is great and glorious; a patience invincible, a love that passes the comprehension either of men or angels. To that therefore we must look as to the pattern to which we are to be conformed: and though it is not possible that we should ever come near to his perfection, yet we must aspire after it; and, setting him ever before our eyes, must endeavour in all things to “walk as he walked.”]

3. The criterion whereby we are to judge of our spirit and conduct—

[It is often difficult to ascertain the precise quality of our own actions; but here are two things, by which, as by a rule or plummet, we may be enabled to form a correct judgment. Let us compare our spirit and conduct with that which is discernible in worldly men: and we may be nearly sure, that, if we resemble them, we are wrong. Let us next turn to the Lord Jesus Christ, and see what his spirit and conduct were on similar occasions: and we may safely conclude, that we are right or wrong, in proportion as we resemble him, or differ from him. We do not undertake to say, that these tests are infallible in all cases; because a worldly man may sometimes do what is materially right, though from a wrong principle; and because the cases between our Lord and ourselves may not be sufficiently parallel: but the person who will habituate

himself to try his spirit by these tests, will have a light, which will assist him in the most intricate paths, and preserve him from innumerable errors, into which he would fall, if he had no such clew to guide him. And let not this hint be overlooked; for, “who can understand his errors?” On many occasions, the Apostles themselves “knew not what spirit they were of.” Had they on the present occasion reflected either on the conduct of the world, or on the conduct of their Lord, they would have been kept from proud ambition on the one hand, and from envious indignation on the other. Whilst therefore we pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, let us be thankful for any subordinate means of ascertaining his mind and will: and let us endeavour so to walk, that Christ himself may testify concerning us, “Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!”]

MCCCCXLIV.

BLIND BARTIMEUS CURED.

Mark. x. 49, 50. *And they call the blind man, saying unto him, Be of good comfort, rise; he calleth thee. And he, casting away his garment, rose, and came to Jesus.*

OUR Lord, like the sun in the firmament, prosecuted without intermission the great ends of his ministry, diffusing innumerable blessings wheresoever he bent his course. The miracle which he performed at Jericho, though similar in many respects to some others which are recorded, has some circumstances peculiar to itself, which deserve to be attentively considered. St. Matthew mentions two persons who were joint-petitioners on this occasion; but St. Mark confines his narration to Bartimeus alone, as the more noted of the two, and as the chief speaker. To comprehend the most important incidents in this history, we shall consider,

I. The state of the person whom Jesus called—

Bartimeus was a distressed and humble suppliant for mercy—

[He was both blind, and necessitated to subsist on the precarious bounty of those who might pass him on the highway. Who would have thought that God should suffer one, towards whom he had designs of love and mercy, to be

reduced to so low a state? Yet such is his sovereign appointment in many instances; his own children are lying at the gate full of sores, while his enemies are faring sumptuously every day. Hearing that Jesus passed by, this blind man earnestly importuned his aid. He would not lose the opportunity which now occurred; nor cease from his cries till he had obtained his request. His language was expressive of an assured faith in Jesus the promised Messiah, at the very time that the rulers and Pharisees almost unanimously rejected him. Thus it is frequently found, that those things which are hid from the wise and prudent are revealed unto babes.]

Afflictive as such a condition is, it affords a pleasant and hopeful prospect—

[Distress of any kind cannot but be an object of commiseration; but none is so much to be deprecated as the blindness of the mind. The loss of eye-sight is no more worthy to be compared with this, than the body with the soul, or time with eternity. Miserable beyond description are they, the eyes of whose understanding have never yet been enlightened to behold the wonderful things of God's law. But if we be sensible of our blindness; if we be calling upon Jesus as the appointed and all-sufficient Saviour, if we be persevering in prayer notwithstanding all our discouragements, and saying, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me," we are surely in a hopeful state; we are not far from the kingdom of God.]

In confirmation of this point we proceed to shew,
 II. The encouragement which the call of Jesus afforded him—

The command which Jesus gave was announced to Bartimeus with joyful congratulations—

[Jesus had declined for some time to notice his cries, but at last commanded him to be brought unto him. What a gleam of hope must instantly have irradiated the mind of this poor suppliant! A few minutes before, he had been rebuked by the multitude, and bidden to hold his peace; but, happily for him, their rebukes had operated to quicken rather than to damp his ardour. Now also the voices of those who had checked him were changed, and their rebukes were turned to encouraging exhortations. The very call was deemed an earnest of the mercy that had been solicited.]

And are not the calls of Jesus a ground of encouragement to all who feel their need of mercy?

[He does not, it is true, call any of us by name; but the

minute descriptions given of those whom he does invite, are far more satisfactory to the soul, than the most express mention of our names could be: we might doubt whether there were not others of our name; but who can doubt whether he be a sinner, a lost sinner? Yet such are repeatedly declared to be the very persons whom he came to seek and save. Are we, like the blind man, longing for mercy, and striving to obtain it? It is impossible to doubt whether Jesus have mercy in store for us, since he particularly calls to him "every one that thirsteth." Only let his invitations be treasured up in our minds, and we shall never despond, never entertain a doubt of obtaining our desire at last.]

Participating in the general joy which this call excited, let us trace,

III. The effect it produced upon him—

He arose and went to Jesus without delay—

[Intent upon one point of infinite importance, he disregarded his garment, as the Samaritan woman on another occasion did her water-pot; or perhaps, fearing that it would retard his motion, he cast it away, that he might the more speedily obey the summons. Valuable as it must have been to one so poor, he utterly despised it, when the prospect of a cure had cheered his soul; nor would he retain any thing that should for one moment interfere with his expected bliss. Instantly he went, and made known to Jesus the particular mercy which he desired. He asked not any pecuniary aid, but that, of which the value was above rubies. He had come to one who was able to grant whatever he should ask; and, as he was not straitened in his Benefactor, he would not be straitened in his own petitions.]

Such should be the effect which the calls of Jesus should produce on us—

[We should not hesitate one moment to comply with his gracious invitations, nor should any worldly concerns occupy our thoughts when a prospect of mercy presents itself to our view. We should cast off every thing, however dear or even necessary it may be to us, rather than suffer it to retard our spiritual progress. "We should lay aside every weight, and the sin that most easily besets us, in order that we may run with patience and activity the race that is set before us." Going to Jesus we should spread all our wants before him. If he ask, "What wouldst thou that I should do unto thee?" we should be ready to reply, 'Lord, open my eyes, forgive my sins, renew my soul.' If we thus improve his calls, we shall never be disappointed of our hope.]

We shall CONCLUDE with recommending to your imitation the conduct of this blind beggar. Imitate,

1. His humility—

[It is scarcely possible for words to express deeper humility than that manifested by Bartimeus. He sought nothing but mercy for mercy's sake: he had no plea but that of his own misery, together with that which was implied in the appellation given to Jesus. The Son of David was to confirm his divine mission by the most benevolent and stupendous miracles. The import of the beggar's petition therefore was, 'Let *me*, the poorest, meanest, and most necessitous of mankind, be made a monument of thy power and grace.' Such exactly is to be the spirit and temper with which we must approach the Lord. If we bring any self-righteous plea, or build our hope upon any thing besides the work and offices of Christ, we never can find acceptance with him. It is the broken and contrite spirit, and that alone, which God will not despise.]

2. His perseverance—

[The circumstances under which he persevered in his requests were very discouraging. He was rebuked by the people, and, to appearance, disregarded by Christ; yet, instead of relaxing, he redoubled his efforts to obtain mercy. Thus should we pray and not faint. Discouragements we must expect both from without and from within. The world will cry out against us, and God himself may appear to have forsaken us: but we must argue like the lepers, and say, 'If I cease to call upon him, I *must* perish; and I can but perish if I continue my supplications. Thus must we continue in prayer with all perseverance; breaking through every difficulty, casting away every impediment, and determining, if we perish, to perish at the feet of Christ. Would to God that there were within us such a spirit! Sooner should heaven and earth pass away than such a suppliant be finally rejected.]

3. His gratitude—

[When healed by Jesus, we find the same contempt for secular interests as he had manifested under his distress. From henceforth his concern was to honour his Benefactor: he instantly became a stated follower of Jesus, a living witness of his mercy and power. How differently did he act from those who seek the Lord in their affliction, but, as soon as ever they are relieved, forget all the vows that are upon them! Let not us be of this base and odious character. Let us rather yield up ourselves as living sacrifices to the Lord, and devote ourselves wholly to his service. Let the remembrance of his kindness be

ever engraven on our hearts, and a grateful sense of it be ever legible in our lives. Thus shall we answer the end for which his mercy is imparted, and be numbered among his followers in a better world.]

MCCCCXLV.

THE IMPORTANCE OF FAITH IN PRAYER.

Mark xi. 24. *I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.*

THERE is no grace more highly commended in the Scriptures, than faith: for though in some respects love may be considered as the greater, inasmuch as it more assimilates us to the Deity, and is of infinitely longer duration^a; yet faith is the parent of love, and the root of every other grace. Faith, above all other graces, honours God, and benefits the soul; for it gives to him the glory of all his infinite perfections, and brings down from him a supply of all those blessings which he has promised to bestow. Its efficacy is particularly seen in prayer: our Lord has assured us, that it shall secure to us every blessing that we ask for: "I say unto you," &c. &c.

It is our intention to shew,

I. What is that faith which we are to exercise in prayer—

[Many distinguish between that faith which worketh miracles, and that whereby we obtain salvation: but I much doubt the propriety of the distinction, *as it is usually explained*. It is supposed that the faith itself is different: but I apprehend that the difference exists, not in the faith, but in the objects of that faith: the faith is the same; but its operation is different, according to the objects on which it is exercised. I would say of faith, so far as it relates to our present subject, that it is *an expectation founded on a promise*. To expect any thing which God has not promised, is *presumption*: to doubt the fulfilment of what he has promised, is *unbelief*: to expect the accomplishment of his word is *faith*.

But promises are of different kinds; some are *absolute* and others *conditional*: and the office of faith is to apprehend them

^a 1 Cor. xiii. 13.

as they are given; if they are given absolutely, we must expect them absolutely; if conditionally, conditionally. Our faith in each must be equally assured: we must as fully expect the accomplishment of a conditional promise *on the performance of the condition*, as of any promises to which no condition is annexed. But we must be careful not to construe the conditional as absolute, or the absolute as conditional: if we take the absolute promises, and make them to depend on the performance of conditions, we deny to God the exercise of his sovereign grace: if, on the other hand, we make the conditional promises absolute, and expect their accomplishment merely from the circumstance of their fixing themselves strongly on our minds, we shall, on the occurrence of a disappointment, be led to doubt the veracity of God, and to reject all his promises as unworthy of belief.

We will explain ourselves more fully.

There are many promises which we call absolute; such as those which relate to Christ as the Author of salvation to a ruined world^b; such as relate also to the increase and establishment of his Church^c; and such also as afford the broad grounds of hope to all who shall believe in Christ^d. We are to believe these as true and certain, independent of any title to them, or interest in them, possessed by us. *As applied to ourselves* indeed, they may be considered as conditional; but *as indefinitely taken*, they may be called absolute.

There are other promises which we call conditional; because they are made to persons of certain characters, or upon our performance of certain conditions^e: and these we are to believe as infallibly certain to all who attain the qualifications or perform the conditions. Yet we must not imagine that the qualification or the action forms the proper ground on which God bestows the blessing: the blessing is God's free gift, as well when it is conditionally granted, as when it is unconditionally: the bestowment of Canaan on the descendants of Abraham was free, notwithstanding the final possession of it was suspended on their obedience to his commandments; and so it is in all cases: the performance of conditions may be appointed of God as means to an end; and the end may be inseparable from the means; but still the end is God's free gift; and from his free grace alone do we derive our title to it: the use of the means is no more than the beggar's stretching out his hand to receive a proffered donation.

Amongst these may be classed all temporal promises, such as those which relate to health, or riches, or honour: for these

^b Gen. iii. 15. and xii. 3. ^c Isai. ii. 2. and xi. 6—9.

^d Isai. lv. 7. John vi. 37. Acts xiii. 39. 1 John i. 7.

^e Matt. v. 3—10. vii. 7, 8. and xi. 28, 29. Acts xvi. 31.

are no further promised than the bestowment of them shall accord with God's will, and be subservient to his glory. We shall have them in that measure that shall be conducive to our spiritual and eternal welfare. Promises also which relate to others, are of this kind. God engages to "pour out his Spirit on our seed and his blessing on our offspring," &c.^f But this cannot be fulfilled, unless the individuals themselves seek his blessing: and therefore it must be understood as subject to that condition.

Such then is the faith which we are to exercise in prayer. We are to lay hold on the promises of God in his word, and are to apprehend them, *not as they are applied to our minds, but as they are given by God.* Their striking our minds more or less forcibly makes no alteration in them: they are not a whit more or less certain on that account: their accomplishment is no otherwise affected by our conduct than as we exercise faith on them, or entertain doubts respecting them: if we do not credit them, they will not be fulfilled to us; if we do credit them, they will be fulfilled absolutely, or on our performance of the conditions, according to the quality of the promises themselves.]

Having stated what we apprehend to be the kind of faith that we are to exercise, we proceed to mark,

II. The importance of it towards the success of our prayers—

Two things are noted in our text, the one expressed, the other implied; and they will serve to shew us the importance of faith in the strongest light in which it can be seen:

1. *Without it, no prayer even for the smallest blessing can succeed—*

[If we go to God without faith, instead of honouring, we insult him; we tell him to his face, that the representations given of him in his word are too good to be true. Unbelief necessarily ascribes to God a defect either of power or of will to accomplish what he has promised: for if we believe him fully able, and fully willing, to accomplish his word, there remains no ground of doubt. It may be said that doubts may arise from a sense of our own unworthiness: but I answer, that all doubts ascribed to that source, have their origin in pride and ignorance: they argue an unwillingness to receive the promises in our proper character, and an ignorance of the freeness and fulness of the promises. Let us make the case

^f Isai. xliv. 3—5.

our own. We have invited a person to come and receive some great benefit: and he no sooner comes into our presence, than he betrays a doubt about our sincerity, and a suspicion that we intend to disappoint him. Should we be pleased with such a person? Should we feel disposed to extend our benefits to him in such a state? In what light God regards such persons, he himself has told us: he interprets all doubts of his power, or willingness to supply the necessities of his people, as a high provocation; an insult, that kindles his wrath against every person that indulges them^g: and he warns us, that every prayer offered in such a spirit shall be disregarded; and that it will be in vain for such a suppliant to expect ANY THING at his hands^h. Hence the command to all who would find acceptance to their prayers, is, to “lift up holy hands without wrath or *doubting*.”]

2. *With it*, no prayer even for the *greatest* blessing can *fail*—

[Faith honours every perfection of the Deity: his power, his love, his faithfulness are all acknowledged, when we go to him in a firm expectation that he will fulfil his promises. Hence to such suppliants he gives a liberty to “ask for whatsoever they will,” and assures them, that he will fulfil *all* their petitions^k. He does not indeed bind himself to any particular *time* or *manner* of answering their prayers: he may see fit to *defer his answer* for a considerable time; but he will not delay beyond the best time^l. He may also *withhold the particular blessing* that is asked; but he will give a better in its stead; as when he refused Moses his permission to go into the land of Canaan, but gave him a sight of Canaan, and then took him up to heaven^m. He may also *continue the affliction which we desire to have removed*: but he will give us grace to bear it; and will glorify himself by means of it; which, in the eyes of every real saint, will be incomparably better than the removal of itⁿ. It is possible enough that his people under particular circumstances may *think* that he has not answered their prayer; as for instance, when they have been praying for *spiritual benefits*, and he has sent them *temporal calamities*: but the truth is, that he makes their “tribulation to work the very blessings they have sought for, namely, patience, and experience, and hope;” and it is not till long afterwards that they see how mysteriously, yet how graciously, he has answered their petitions. There is but one limit to their petitions,

^g Ps. lxxviii. 19—22, 40, 41.

^h Jam. i. 5—7.

ⁱ 1 Tim. ii. 8.

^k John xiv. 13, 14. xv. 7. and xvi. 24.

^l Luke xviii. 7.

^m Dent. iii. 25, 26. with xxxiv. 4, 5.

ⁿ 2 Cor. xii. 7—9.

namely, the will of God: and if the desire be within that limit, every believer may rest assured, that God either has answered his prayers, or will answer them in due time^o.]

LEARN then from hence,

1. The true nature of prayer—

[It is thought by men in general to be a *duty*: and a duty it certainly is in some point of view; but it should rather be regarded as a *privilege*. In what light did Hagar view access to a fountain, when she and her child were perishing with thirst? In what light did the man-slayer view his liberty of running to the city of refuge? Or in what light would any poor person consider the knocking at our door, when he was bidden to come for a supply of all his wants? O that we viewed aright God's invitations to a throne of grace! We should not come then, as too many do, to *perform a task*; to offer petitions which we neither expected nor desired to have answered; and which, if God should offer to grant them, we would pray back again with ten times more fervour than was put forth in offering them: No: we should come as children to a father, "delighting ourselves in him as our God," and saying with David, "At morning and evening and at noon-day will I pray;" or with the Apostle, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ."]

2. The folly of unbelief—

[Unbelief builds a wall, as it were, between God and us: it effectually prevents all access to him, and as effectually prevents the communications of his grace to us — — — It may be thought, that if God has decreed to give us his blessing, our unbelief shall not prevent it; nor need we be solicitous about praying for it. But are we not told that Jesus "could not do many mighty works at Nazareth because of their unbelief?" Do we not remember that the Apostles failed in their attempts to cast out an unclean spirit "because of their unbelief?" Yea, are we not told, that, "notwithstanding a promise was given to the Israelites that they should enter into Canaan, they entered not in because of unbelief?" When God gave the most absolute promises, he said, "Yet will I be inquired of by the House of Israel to do it for them^p." And, when he declared by his Prophet, that he had "thoughts of peace towards his people to give them an expected end," he particularly added, that "then they should go and pray unto him, and should find him, when they should search for him with their whole heart^q." Let us guard then against this most pernicious evil, and go unto our God, saying, "Lord, I believe: help thou my unbelief."

^o 1 John v. 14, 15. ^p Ezek. xxxvi. 37. ^q Jer. xxix. 11—13.

Yet, in exercising faith, we must guard against presumption; for if our faith be of an unhallowed kind, and go beyond the promise, it shall not be crowned with success. When Elisha heard that the widow's son was dead, he sent his servant with his staff, conceiving that the touch of that would suffice to restore him: but God had promised no such thing; and therefore the attempt failed^r. But in exercising faith, let us exercise it assuredly indeed, but humbly, and in an exact conformity to the command of God.]

3. The wisdom of treasuring up the promises of God in our mind—

[These are the true *ground* and *measure* of our expectations from God. And, if we look into the Holy Scriptures, we shall find, that there is not a state or condition in which we can be placed, but there is a promise exactly suited to it. We go with confidence to an honourable man, when we have a promise of any thing under his own hand: with what confidence then may we go to God, when we can take his promises along with us! Look at Jacob, how he pleads with God a promise that had been given him many years before^s: see David pleading in like manner^t: and learn from them the true use of the promises; “nor ever stagger at them through unbelief; but be strong in faith, giving glory to God.” They are “exceeding great and precious,” commensurate with all our necessities. Let us therefore account nothing too great to ask; but “open our mouth wide, that God may fill it:” “nor shall one jot or tittle fail of all the good things that he has promised to us.”]

^r 2 Kings iv. 29, 31.

^s Gen. xxviii. 15. with xxxii. 12.

^t 2 Sam. vii. 25. Ps. cxix. 49.

MCCCCXLVI.

THE REGARD DUE TO CHRIST.

Mark xii. 6. *They will reverence my son.*

THERE are many passages of Scripture, wherein God speaks of himself as frustrated and disappointed by the conduct of his creatures. We are not however to suppose that events happened really contrary to the purposes he had fixed or the expectations he had formed: for it is certain that “he doeth according to his will in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth;” and that “known

unto him are all his works, from the foundation of the world." The truth is, that God speaks after the manner of men, for the sake of accommodating himself to our low and feeble apprehensions; and therefore we must understand his words in a popular sense, without deducing from them all the conclusions which they may appear to warrant.

In the parable before us, he is represented as adopting an expedient, which, humanly speaking, could not fail of success. He had sent many servants to the Jews, in order to obtain from them the fruits of his vineyard: but some of them they had beaten, and others they had killed. "Having therefore One Son, his well-beloved," he determined to send him, judging it impossible, as it were, that they should lift up their hands, or move their tongues against him; "They will reverence my Son." But in the sequel of the parable we are informed, that, notwithstanding the numerous and solid grounds on which this expectation was formed, their hostility to him was more inveterate than it had been to any who had preceded him; and their treatment of him was the more cruel on account of the relation he bore to God, and the interest he claimed in the vineyard.

Conforming ourselves to the mode of speaking which God himself has suggested in the text, it will be proper to consider,

I. The grounds of his expectation—

If we were to confine the subject to Christ's reception among the Jews, we should notice the peculiar circumstances of his incarnation, the spotless purity of his character, the multitude of his benevolent and stupendous miracles, and his perfect correspondence with all that had been predicted concerning him. But, that we may bring the subject home to our own bosoms, we shall omit these general topics, which interest us chiefly as proving his Messiahship, and shall notice others which mark more strongly the grounds of a believer's attachment to him.

God then may well expect us to reverence his Son,

1. On account of the dignity of his person—

[Jesus, though born of a woman, differed infinitely from any other of the human race. He was, in an exalted and appropriate sense, the Son of God; “his only Son, his well-beloved.” He was God as well as man, “God manifest in the flesh.” As he was “perfect man, so was he also perfect God, equal with the Father as touching his Godhead, at the same time that he was inferior to the Father as touching his manhood.” Now if God had sent us an angel, or only a worm like ourselves, we ought to reverence him, because the authority of the king is to be acknowledged in his ambassador. But when he sends his co-equal, co-eternal Son, who is “Jehovah’s fellow,” even “God over all blessed for evermore,” ought we not to testify all possible respect for him? Surely when he comes to us in his Gospel, and declares who he is, and whence he came, it becomes us to bow the knee before him, and to welcome him from our inmost souls.]

2. On account of our extreme need of him—

[If we did not need a Saviour, we might disregard the Lord Jesus, on the principle that “the whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.” But who amongst us is free from sin? or who can make compensation to God for his iniquities? Who can satisfy Divine justice, or avert the wrath which his sins have merited? If we cannot do these things, and God has sent his only dear Son to do them for us, ought we not to reverence his Son? Ought we not to receive him with the warmest gratitude and affection? Suppose that having sent his Son into this world, God were now to send him to the regions below, where millions of our fellow-creatures are enduring the punishment due to their transgressions: Would the unhappy sufferers disregard his offers of mercy as we do? Would they not throng him on every side, and vie with each other in rending the air with their acclamations and hosannas? Why then should not we do the same? for wherein do we differ from them, except in this, that we are under a sentence of condemnation, but on them the sentence is already executed? Surely God may well expect, that we should be as solicitous to escape the wrath we fear, as others would be to obtain deliverance from the wrath they feel.]

3. On account of the benefits he will impart to us—

[If we hoped for nothing more than to avoid the miseries of hell, methinks we could never sufficiently reverence that adorable Saviour who came to deliver us from them. But this is a small part only of the blessings which he will bestow upon us. He will introduce us to the presence of his heavenly Father, and give us the most delightful fellowship with him:]

He will rescue us from the dominion of sin and Satan, and transform us into the image of our God in righteousness and true holiness: He will even exalt us to thrones of glory, and make us partakers of the honour and felicity which he himself enjoys at the right hand of God. And when God was sending us his own Son to impart all these benefits, had he not good reason to say, "They will reverence my Son?" If a doubt had been suggested whether such a Benefactor would be welcomed upon earth, should we not have been ready to inveigh against the person who suggested it, as a calumniator of the human race?]

But events have happened widely different from this prediction. God, if we may so speak, has been disappointed in his expectations; and that too in an incredible degree. This will appear by considering,

II. The extent of his disappointment—

How the Lord Jesus was treated among the Jews, it is scarcely needful to mention. Those who are the least instructed amongst us know, that instead of being revered, he was loaded with all manner of indignities, and at last put to death, even the cruel and ignominious death of the cross. Amongst us, it may be thought, he meets with a more favourable reception: but in truth, God is as much disappointed in our conduct towards him, as in that of the Jews themselves: for,

1. His person is slighted—

[We do indeed externally revere the name of Jesus, and profess to call him our Lord and Saviour: but do we really reverence him in our hearts? Is he truly precious in our eyes? Is he "fairer than ten thousand, and altogether lovely?" Alas! how many days and months have we passed without so much as one affectionate thought of him! How many years might we spend in different families without hearing any heart-felt commendations of him, or being once exhorted to love and serve him! The excellencies of others are painted in glowing colours; the praises of statesmen and warriors are sounded forth in every place: but in Jesus we "see no beauty, no comeliness, for which he is to be desired:" nor have we any delight in celebrating the wonders of his love.]

2. His authority is disregarded—

[If we warn any person against such or such a line of conduct from the consideration of its being injurious to his health,

his honour, or his interests, every word we utter will be duly weighed, and produce an effect suited to its importance. But if we say to any one, 'Our blessed Lord requires this, or forbids that,' we only excite a smile of contempt; and the person goes on his way without the smallest concern. Nor is this peculiar to some hardened rebels: it is found equally in persons of every age and every rank. If we call upon the rich to obey his voice, they are too much occupied about the world to attend to our exhortations: they bid us go to the poor, who alone need be subject to such restraints. When we exhort the poor to serve him, they tell us that they are not scholars; that they have no time to attend to such things; and that the rich alone, who have learning and leisure, can properly be expected to devote themselves to his service. When we address ourselves to the young, they reply that it will be time enough for them to think of religion some years hence. And when we speak to the old, and endeavour to bring them into subjection to Christ, they reply with anger, that they have not to learn their religion at this time of day; they do not like such novel notions; they have done to others as they would be done unto; and that they will go to heaven their own way.

We appeal to the observation and experience of all, whether this be not the way in which men almost universally treat the authority of Christ.]

3. His offices are superseded—

[Christ has undertaken, as a Prophet, to teach us; as a Priest, to make atonement for us: and, as a King, to rule over us. But do we seek to be taught by him in all things, conforming our sentiments gladly to his written word, and imploring earnestly the enlightening influences of his Spirit? Do we not rather lean to our own understanding, and adopt the sentiments of an ungodly world? Do we trust simply in his obedience unto death, renouncing unfeignedly every other ground of hope, and looking for acceptance solely through his blood and righteousness? Do we not rather substitute some works of our own in the room of his, or at least place some reliance on them instead of relying on him alone? How we set aside his kingly authority, has been already noticed. What shall we say then? Can God be pleased with this? Must it not be extremely painful to him to see all the offices which his dear Son undertook to execute for us, thus entirely superseded?

If any be disposed to contradict this statement, let them only look within, and, as in the presence of God, inquire whether they be really living by faith on Christ, and making use of him from day to day as their "wisdom, their righteousness, their sanctification, and redemption?" A candid examination of their own hearts will soon convince them, that their

faith in Christ is rather nominal, than real; and that, while they acknowledge him as a Saviour, they do not cordially cleave unto him, or unreservedly embrace him.]

4. His cause and interests are opposed—

[One would imagine that they who do not reverence Christ themselves, would at least permit others to honour and adore him. But “the carnal mind is enmity against him;” and nothing will more effectually call forth that enmity, than a zealous endeavour to glorify his name. Men can see people on every side neglecting and despising Christ, and never once endeavour to reclaim them from their evil ways: but let any person begin to reverence Christ in his heart, and to manifest his regard to him by a suitable conversation, and they will instantly feel a fear and jealousy lest he should love and serve the Saviour too much. However excellent his conduct be, he will become an object of contempt and ridicule, in proportion as his love to Christ is influential on his heart and life. We appeal to matter of fact: Are not they who were respected and beloved while they were utterly regardless of Christ, considered as weak and contemptible as soon as ever they submit to his authority, and devote themselves to his service? Or, if their weight of character bear down this reproach, are they not lowered at least in the estimation of the world? It is a fact, that they are looked upon as signs and wonders; and that it is thought a disgrace by many even to be acquainted with them.

How astonishing then must be the disappointment of God the Father, when his only, his beloved Son is not merely rejected by the world whom he came to save, but is made a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence, insomuch that an unfeigned attachment to him shall be sufficient to call forth their most contemptuous revilings, and, in many instances, their most cruel resentment!]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are disappointing the expectations of their God—

[You doubtless have expectations respecting the manner in which you shall be treated in the day of judgment. You are saying, ‘My God will surely have mercy upon me, and will save my soul.’ But, if you are continually disappointing the expectations of your God, shall not you also be disappointed? Shall his hopes be frustrated, and yours realized; more especially when his are founded on such a reasonable basis, and yours are altogether groundless? Ah! be assured of this, that God will have respect to none who do not reverence his dear Son; and that Jesus himself will say at last, “Bring

hither those that were mine enemies, who would not that I should reign over them, and slay them before me.”]

2. Those who are endeavouring to fulfil the will of God—

[Thanks be to God! there are some who “honour the Son even as they honour the Father;” and whose delight it is to render him the fruits which he requires. Ye, beloved, shall be highly favoured of your God; for he has said, “Him that honoureth me, I will honour.” But shall ye receive honour from men? No, verily; for “the servant neither is, nor can be, above his Lord:” “if they called the Master of the house Beelzebub, much more will they those of his household.” “Marvel not then if the world hate you; but remember, that they hated Christ before they hated you:” and that, “if ye be hated for righteousness’ sake,” ye have reason to “glorify God on this behalf.” Only seek to express your reverence to Christ, not by needless singularities, but by solid and substantial piety; by bringing forth the fruits of righteousness to his praise and glory.]

MCCCCXLVII.

DUTIES TO OUR EARTHLY AND OUR HEAVENLY KING.

Mark xii. 17. *And Jesus answering, said unto them, Render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar’s, and to God the things that are God’s. And they marvelled at him.*

IT is said of Jesus, that “he spake as never man spake.” This was true, as to his general instructions: but it was more especially manifest, when, by the malice of his enemies, he was brought into circumstances wherein a merely finite wisdom would have been insufficient for his guidance. Such was the occasion now before us. He had spoken a parable which had greatly incensed his hearers, the Scribes and Pharisees. Had they dared, they would have seized him and put him to death: but, fearing the people, they determined to accomplish his ruin in a more specious way. They sent to him persons to ensnare him in his words, that so they might “deliver him up to the power and authority of the governor,” and accomplish through him what they dared not to

perpetrate by themselves^a. It was in answer to a question put to him by them, that he gave the direction in my text: in considering which, I will point out,

I. The wisdom of it, as a reply to the question proposed—

[The persons sent to him were of two widely different castes: some were Pharisees, who were adverse to the dominion of the Romans, and encouraged the people to cast off their yoke; the others were Herodians, who were altogether in the interest of the Romans, and sought, by all possible means, to uphold their authority. Just at that time, it is probable, they were called upon to pay a tax levied by the Roman emperor; and much difference of opinion prevailed at Jerusalem about the obligation of the people to pay it. The Pharisees and Herodians were at issue upon the subject: and this afforded the Scribes and priests a good opportunity to ensnare our Lord. They prevailed on some from each of the contending parties, to “feign themselves pious and conscientious men;” and to go to our Lord, and submit their differences to his arbitration, under the idea that his judgment would be satisfactory and final. Accordingly they came, professing their perfect reliance on him; who, being taught of God, must certainly know what was right; and, being commissioned by God, would be equally unmoved by either the favour or the frowns of man: and they put the question plainly to him, “Is it lawful to give tribute to Cæsar, or not? Shall we give? or shall we not give^b?”

Now this question was very ensnaring: for, if he should determine the point in favour of the Herodians, the Pharisees would stir up the indignation of the people against him, as an enemy to their liberties: if, on the other hand, he should determine it in favour of the Pharisees, the Herodians would accuse him to the Roman governor, as guilty of sedition. If he should decline giving any answer, then they would both of them revoke the sentiments they had expressed respecting his divine mission; and would expose him to all, as either ignorant, or actuated by fear and carnal policy. Thus, *humanly speaking*, it was impossible he should escape the snare laid for him. Whatever he might either do or not do, they would be sure to find occasion against him.

But Jesus “saw their hypocrisy and their wickedness;” and, with a wisdom truly divine, bade them “shew him a penny,” a silver coin current at that time^c. On its being shewn him, he asked, “Whose image and superscription it bore?” They,

^a See Luke xx. 19, 20.

^b ver. 14, 15.

^c Worth about seven-pence halfpenny.

not at all aware of the drift of his question, answered, "Cæsar's;" thereby unwittingly acknowledging that they were under the dominion of Cæsar; seeing, that on no other supposition could they acknowledge his money as the current coin of the kingdom. *Thus they were taken in their own snare*: for on their answer to him was his reply founded: "Render, therefore, unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's." Thus, both the parties were disappointed in their malignant endeavours: and they departed from him, greatly wondering at the wisdom that had extricated him from the snare, in which it seemed impossible but that he must be taken^d.]

But, in considering this reply, we must especially notice,

II. The importance of it, as a precept for general observance—

In it we see,

1. The extent of God's requirements—

[Towards our earthly governors we have special obligations. They are God's representatives and vicegerents upon earth: and the authority which they sustain, is no other than God's own authority delegated to them. What our duty to them is, we may see fully set forth by St. Paul, in the Epistle to the Romans^e — — — And that duty we must discharge, "not only for wrath, but also for conscience' sake." Whilst we "fear God, we must honour the king."

Towards God himself we are, of course, bound to render all possible obedience. All that we are, and all that we have, is his. We are his by creation, and his in a more especial manner by redemption. "We are bought with a price, even the precious blood of his only dear Son; and we are, therefore, bound to glorify him with our body and our spirit, which are his" — — —]

2. The harmony of them—

[These duties are by no means opposed the one to the other. The two tables of the law are in perfect harmony with each other. Doubtless God is to be obeyed in the first place: and if man's requirements be contrary to his, the point is determined for us, (indeed every man's own conscience will at once determine it.) "We must obey God rather than man." But we should not without necessity place them in opposition to each other. We should rather place our duty to man in

^d See the last clause of the text.

^e Rom. xiii. 1—7. *Cite* this fully, and with a brief comment on it.

subordination to our duty to God; and so endeavour to perform the commands of both, that both may be honoured and both be pleased. The Pharisees had much to say for themselves against the right claimed by the Romans to govern that people^f. The Herodians, on the other hand, had much to say in support of the Roman government. But, circumstanced as they all were, our Lord, though afterwards accused of forbidding to pay tribute to Cæsar^g, determined it to be their duty to pay to Cæsar what belonged to Cæsar, no less than unto God what belonged to God. In conformity with which decision,]

I would RECOMMEND to all of you,

1. *Integrity*, in the discharge of your duty to man—

[There is in many a prevailing disposition to “speak evil of dignities.” This should on no account be indulged ——— Loyalty, even towards a Nero or a Saul, ought to be a very prominent feature in the Christian character. To defraud the revenue also, by the evasion of taxes, is a conduct of which every Christian should be ashamed ———]

2. *Spirituality*, in the discharge of our duty to God—

[It is not a mere formal service that God requires, but the service of the heart. This, then, must be rendered unto God, “whose will should be done on earth as it is done in heaven” ———]

^f Pompey had prevailed through the treachery of Hircanus, and not altogether by fair conquest.

^g Luke xxiii. 2.

MCCCCXLVIII.

THE RESURRECTION PROVED FROM THE PENTATEUCH.

Mark xii. 26, 27. *As touching the dead, that they rise; have ye not read in the book of Moses, how in the bush God spake unto him, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living: ye therefore do greatly err.*

IT is no uncommon thing for persons to conclude a doctrine to be false, because it may be attended with difficulties which they are not able to solve. This is the great source of objection in the minds of infidels, who do not merely ask, “How can these things be?” but reject at once the plainest declarations of Scripture, because they cannot comprehend every thing

relating to them. In this manner the Free-thinkers among the Jews discarded the greater part of the Scriptures, together with the most fundamental articles of their religion. They denied, for instance, the resurrection of the body, and it is supposed, the immortality of the soul also: and having, as they imagined, insurmountable objections to those doctrines, they came to propose them to our Lord, in full confidence that they should confound him, and overthrow the system which he was endeavouring to establish.

Their great objection was taken from the word of God itself, which appointed, that, if a man died childless, his brother should marry his widow, in order to raise up seed unto the departed person, and to prevent his name from being lost in Israel^a. They, for argument's sake, assumed a case, which certainly was within the sphere of possibility. They stated, that a man with six younger brothers died without children; and that, in compliance with the Divine command, his next brother married her; and he also died childless. In like manner all the brothers in succession married her, and all died without issue. Now, as the Sadducees imagined, that, if there were any future world, the same relationship as existed now must of necessity continue, they could not conceive which of the seven brethren would be acknowledged for her husband.

Our blessed Lord informed them, that they were quite mistaken about the nature of the future state; for that no matrimonial connexions would be formed there; but all would be, like the angels, wholly engrossed with spiritual delights: and, as to their secret thought that the resurrection was a thing impossible, they erred from an ignorance of what the Scripture had said respecting it, and of the power of God to effect it. Our Lord then called to their remembrance the passage of Scripture which we have just read; and which we will now consider,

I. As establishing the point at issue—

^a Deut. xxxv. 5—10.

The Sadducees acknowledged only the five books of Moses as of divine authority: and therefore our blessed Lord, passing by the many plainer passages which are contained in the prophetic writings, adduced one from the book of Exodus^b, which, obscurely indeed, but certainly, contained the doctrine in question—

[God, when he spoke to Moses in the bush, announced himself to him as “the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob.” Now this was two hundred years after the youngest of them was dead: and yet God speaks of the relation to them as still existing. But “God is not the God of the dead, but of the living:” the very title therefore which God assumed, implied that those persons were yet alive. Nor did it less forcibly imply, that their bodies also should be restored to life: for they, as men, consisted both of body and soul; and God was as much the God of their bodies as of their souls; and therefore if their bodies should never rise again, that relation had ceased with respect to their bodies. If it be said, that death had already terminated that relation; I answer, that their bodies were merely “sleeping in the dust” till the morning of the resurrection, when they shall awake to everlasting life; and that, as God was no less their God when they were asleep on their beds, than he was during the day, so is he their God now that they are sleeping in their graves, as much as he ever was, or ever will be. *In respect of God, with whom all things, past and future, are ever present, and “who calleth things that be not, as though they were,” they are now alive, seeing that they certainly shall live at the last day^c.*

But the terms here used to designate the Deity, imply, that that these patriarchs had an interest in him, and were partakers of blessings from him. But if their souls were not alive, they inherited no blessing from God; and if their bodies were not to rise, they would only be *partially* blessed: but they had served God with their bodies as well as with their souls: and therefore their bodies were entitled to a share of that reward which they had looked forward to, and in the prospect of which they had submitted to many hardships and privations: and that God, who had promised to be “their exceeding great reward^d,” would not deprive them of their expected benefits.

What weight this argument may have with modern infidels, I know not; but it convinced and confounded all the

^b Exod. iii. 6, 16.

^c This seems to be the true sense of these words, πάντες γὰρ ἀν-ψ̄ ζῶσιν: Luke xx. 38. See Beza's note on the place. Most other commentators seem to mistake their import.

^d Gen. xv. 1.

Sadducees; insomuch that “not one of them dared to put any other question to him^e.”]

Let us proceed to consider the quotation,

II. As declaring the believer’s privileges—

All that the passage implied in reference to the patriarchs, it implies in reference to believers in every age. It implies,

1. That a relation subsists between God and them—

[The covenant which God made with Abraham was expressly made also with all his spiritual seed^f. His natural seed, *as such*, had no part in them: neither Ishmael nor Esau had any share in this covenant: it was confined, in the first instance, to him who was born after the promise; and afterwards to those who, like him, should be born of the Spirit^g. Amongst these, the true believer is numbered, though he should have no relation to Abraham after the flesh. This is asserted by St. Paul in the plainest terms^h, and consequently, every believer stands in the very same relation to God that Abraham himself did. Hear this, all ye who believe in Christ; every one of you may adopt the words of David, and say, “O God, thou art my God:” and, in saying this, you may claim all God’s perfections to be exercised for you, as much as ever they were exercised for the patriarchs of old.]

2. That covenant-blessings are provided for them—

[In the covenant were conveyed all spiritual and eternal blessings to those with whom it was madeⁱ: and if we believe in Christ, they all belong to us^k. In the present life we have a portion infinitely superior to that of the mere worldling: all that he feeds upon is as husks, in comparison of that heavenly manna which the saints partake of; they have “angels’ food,” “a peace that passeth understanding, a joy unspeakable and glorified.” Whilst “the Egyptians were involved in darkness, the Israelites had light in their dwellings.” But “who can conceive what God hath prepared for them” in a better world? Were they possessed of no better portion than what they have here, he would be ashamed to call himself their God: but St. Paul says, “He is not ashamed to be called their God; for he hath prepared for them a city^l.” If then we truly belong to Christ, we may adopt the triumphant language of the Apostle, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ^m.”]

^e Luke xx. 39, 40.

^f Gen. xvii. 7, 8.

^g Gal. iv. 22, 23, 30, 31.

^h Gal. iii. 7—9.

ⁱ Gen. xii. 2, 3.

^k Gal. iii. 13, 14.

^l Heb. xi. 16.

^m Eph. i. 3.

3. That in the last day these blessings shall be fully and eternally enjoyed—

[Whatever we possess in this world, it is only transient. The believer's path is not always smooth: he has many trials; and "through much tribulation is his way to the kingdom." But in heaven he has arrived at a state of unmixed, uninterrupted happiness. There, his soul is at perfect rest. Here, he groans by reason of sin; there, "having awaked up after the perfect likeness of his God, he is satisfied with itⁿ." Here, he has many interruptions to his bliss; there, nothing finds admittance that can for a moment cloud his joy^o. Here, he is dependent on others for a good measure of his happiness: but there no connexions can augment his bliss, nor can any operate to the diminution of it. In a word, "he is equal to the angels:" and as the patriarchs are now in the full fruition of that portion, so shall he shortly be, and "sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of his God."]]

From this subject we may LEARN,

1. To make a practical use of the Holy Scriptures—

[We should not readily have conceived that such important truths were contained in the words of God to Moses, if our blessed Lord had not unfolded them to our view. But, in fact, there is in all the words of Scripture a depth which we cannot fathom. Of this we are not sufficiently aware; and therefore we content ourselves with a superficial view of them, without exploring diligently their contents. But our Lord teaches us to reflect on what we read: 'Have ye not read so and so in the Book of Moses?' and ought you not from thence to have learned such and such truths? ought you not to have drawn from it such and such conclusions? We entreat you then, brethren, to "mark, learn, and inwardly digest" what you read in the Holy Scriptures; and to treasure up the truths contained in them for the instruction, and comfort, and sanctification of your souls.]

2. To seek an interest in the Lord Jesus Christ—

[It is in Christ only that we become partakers of the blessings of God's covenant: "If ye be Christ's," says the Apostle, "then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise^p." Till we be united to Christ by faith, we have no part or lot in his salvation. O that all would consider this! O that all would inquire, what evidence they have that they have ever come to Christ aright, and they are really "accepted in the beloved!" Brethren, flee to this adorable Saviour, and

ⁿ Ps. xvii. 15.

^o Rev. xxi. 3, 4.

^p Gal. iii. 29.

lay hold upon him, and cleave unto him with full purpose of heart; and then you may with confidence call God your Father, and say, "This God is our God for ever and ever."]

3. To look forward with joy to the eternal world—

[There will you meet all the glorified saints from Abel to the present hour. Not one of them is lost: God is still their God as much as ever. Dread not death, then, which shall introduce you to their company — — — Nor regret too deeply the loss of pious friends. Think that when you are following their bodies to the grave, their souls are in Abraham's bosom, feasting at the marriage supper of the Lamb in heaven. What kind of knowledge we shall have of each other then, we know not; but it is probable that, as there are no relative connexions, so neither are there relative partialities; but all will be like the angels of God, filled with love and joy to the utmost capacity of their souls. In one respect indeed, the blessedness of the just is not yet complete: because their bodies are not yet raised to a participation of it; but we may look forward to the morning of the resurrection, when all who have fallen asleep in Christ shall awake unto life, and possess both in body and soul the full and everlasting enjoyment of their God. Brethren, "Comfort ye one another with these words"^a—]

^a 1 Thess. iv. 18.

MCCCCXLIX.

LOVE TO GOD, THE GREAT COMMANDMENT.

Mark xii. 28—30. *And one of the Scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all? And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; the Lord our God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.*

IT is no uncommon thing for those who plainly declare the truth, to be beset by cavillers and objectors. Our blessed Lord, who spake as never man spake, endured continually this contradiction of sinners against himself. He had been captiously interrogated by Pharisees, Herodians, and Sadducees, and had put them all to silence. But he was again attacked by one of the Scribes, who either was, or

thought himself, more subtle than any of those who had preceded him, and had already been confounded. It was a matter of controversy at that time whether were the greater, the rites of the ceremonial, or the commandments of the moral, law; and he applied to our Lord to give his opinion on the subject. The question being one of primary importance, our Lord referred to Moses, to whom all the disputants were ready to appeal, and by whose judgment they would consider the case as decided, and told them from him what they must consider as determined on the point^a.

But this point is of as much importance as ever: and therefore I will endeavour to shew,

I. What is the first and great commandment of all—

It is that which stands first in the Decalogue, and is marked with a solemnity peculiar to itself.

There is but one God, who is Lord of heaven and earth—

[The heathen worshipped many gods: and even the better informed amongst them thought that there were two great principles or powers, the one the author of all good, the other the author of all evil. But, in opposition to all such errors, our Lord informed him, that there was One eternally self-existent Being, from whom all other beings emanated and derived their existence: and that, as HE was the One source of all, so he was the Lord and Governor of all, inspecting, controlling, ordering all things both in heaven and earth.

We are not to understand this as militating against the doctrine of a Trinity of Persons in the Godhead. If we so separated these Persons as to make their actions independent of each other, then we should indeed do, what the Jews are ready to impute to us, worship three Gods. But we acknowledge and maintain *the unity* of the Godhead, as much as they: yet, as God in many passages of Holy Writ has shewn us, that there is in that unity a distinction of persons, one called the Father, the other the Son, and the other the Holy Ghost, and that each of these persons has his own proper office in the economy of redemption, we admit that distinction, and look to each of those Divine Persons to accomplish, in us and for us, his proper office. Still we deny, as strongly as the Jews themselves, a plurality of Gods, and maintain, as Moses has here asserted, “The Lord our God is One Lord.”

^a Deut. vi. 4, 5.

In fact, as learned Jews thought that in these words some peculiar mystery was contained, so some of the early Christians thought that they saw in them a strong intimation of the doctrine of the Trinity in unity^b. But I am always afraid of indulging the imagination upon topics so sacred and mysterious: and therefore I wave all notice of such doubtful matters; and the rather, because that the doctrine of a Trinity of Persons in the Godhead is so clearly and unquestionably revealed in other parts of Holy Writ. I content myself therefore with affirming, that in this passage (*to say the least*) there is nothing repugnant to it.]

Our duty towards him is, to “love him with all our heart, and mind, and soul, and strength”—

[We are to admit no rival into our bosom. The creature indeed may be loved by us, *in subserviency to him*; but HE must possess our supreme regards, and be served on all occasions with the utmost energies of our souls. Nothing is for a moment, or in the slightest possible degree, to alienate our affections from him, or in any respect to divide them with him (he will not receive a divided heart): whatever we have of understanding, will, or affections, they must all be employed for him without cessation, without abatement, and to the remotest period of our lives.

This is the duty of every living man, whether under the law, or under the Gospel: The heathen themselves are not exempt from it. The law itself was inscribed on the heart of man in his first creation; and, effaced as it has been by the introduction of sin, it must be again written on our hearts before we can ever behold the face of God in peace. Not even God himself can absolve us from this law: it is universally and unchangeably necessary to be observed by every child of man.]

Having answered the question thus far, I will proceed to shew,

II. Why this is called “the first and great” commandment^c—

It is justly entitled to this honour,

1. Because obedience to it was the very end for which all our faculties were given us—

[We possess faculties far superior to any other creature upon earth. We have an understanding, whereby we may know God; a will, whereby we may devote ourselves to him;

^b See Bishop Patrick on Deut. vi. 4, 5.

^c Compare Matt. xxii. 38.

affections, whereby we may enjoy him; and bodily powers also, whereby we may serve and glorify him. These no other creature on earth possesses. Hence man has been called *a religious animal*; because he alone has those capacities which fit him for religious exercises. Now for what end were these peculiar faculties conferred upon us? Was it that we might exercise them upon earthly things? On earthly things indeed we may employ them *in subserviency to God*: but it was in order that we might know *him*, and serve *him*, and enjoy *him*, that they were imparted to us; and, if not so employed, they will ultimately prove a curse to us, rather than a blessing. It were better to have been born idiots or beasts, than to have been endowed with such high faculties, unless we improve them for the honour and glory of our God. Hence then this may well be called “the first and great commandment,” because it is that, for the observance of which all our faculties were conferred upon us.

It may also be called the first commandment,]

2. Because, till we obey that, it is not possible that we should obey any other—

[We are told in Scripture, that whatever knowledge we may possess, whatever faith we may exercise, whatever works we may perform, or whatever sufferings we may endure, it will be all of no account whatever, if it proceed not from a principle of love^d. This is true, even as far as *man* is concerned; we must have love to *him*, if ever we would be accepted of God. But much more must we have love to *God*; because without a regard for *his* authority, and a zeal for *his* glory, every thing we do, however good it may be in itself, is a mere selfish act; originating from our own will, and tending to the advancement of our own honour. Love to God is necessary to constitute a religious act; and without it our very best actions are no better than splendid sins.

But further, this may be called the first commandment,]

3. Because obedience to it tends to the utmost perfection of our nature—

[If the joints of our limbs were dislocated, they must all be replaced in their sockets before our bodily powers could be restored. So it is with respect to our souls. All our faculties and powers have been deranged by sin, and rendered incapable of those exertions which constitute the duty and felicity of man. But let love to God once pervade them all, and they will all be reduced to order, and enabled to discharge the

^d 1 Cor. xiii. 1—3.

offices for which they were originally given. The understanding will have its capacity for the comprehension of divine truth renovated and enlarged: the will of itself will turn to every thing which God requires: and the affections will all fix on God as their proper centre, from which neither force nor attraction shall be able to divert them. Love to God will assimilate us to God himself. By “beholding and contemplating his glory, we shall be changed into his image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.”

Once more: this may be called the first and great commandment,]

4. Because by obeying it we shall of necessity be led to obey every other—

[From which of the other commandments would any man who loves God desire to be released? There is not so much as one, that he would wish to have relaxed in any degree. They are all written in his heart; and he longs to have them inscribed there more and more clearly every day he lives. Could he have the desire of his soul, he would have “every thought of his heart brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.”]

I think we have now seen abundant reason why love to God may well be regarded as “the first and great commandment.”

And now I beg your attention to that solemn admonition with which the command itself, both as published by Moses, and cited by our Lord, is introduced, “HEAR, *O Israel!*” Yes, HEAR, all of you, my beloved brethren:

“HEAR this,” first, for your instruction, that ye may know to whom alone your allegiance is due—

[As for other *gods*, there are none that have any claim upon you, or indeed any existence, but in the imaginations of ignorant and ungodly men. There are *men* indeed who claim an authority over you: but their authority is not *their own*: it is *God's*: and they are only as God's deputies, to exercise it for him. Between husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and servants, magistrates and subjects, there is a bond of rule on the one part, and of subjection on the other: but the rule must be *for God*, and the subjection *to God*: and then only are the reciprocal obligations duly performed, when respect is had to God's authority and honour in the discharge of them^e.]

^e Acts iv. 19, 20.

“HEAR this,” secondly, for your humiliation, that you may see how grievously you have failed in your duty towards him—

[In order to form a right estimate of your character before God, you must bring yourselves to this test, and try yourselves by this commandment. But who can abide this test? Who can find any one action in his whole life that came up to the demands of this holy law? The more we bring our lives to this standard, the more we shall see the extreme deficiency of our best deeds, and the absolute need of crying with holy Job, “Behold, I am vile: I repent and abhor myself in dust and ashes.”]

“HEAR this,” thirdly, for the elucidating of the Gospel salvation—

[It is a matter of offence to many, that they should be required utterly to renounce all dependence on their own righteousness, and to seek acceptance only through the righteousness of another, even the righteousness which is of God through faith in Christ. But who that tries himself by this commandment, will find so much as one righteous act performed by him throughout his whole life? Yet, in order to salvation, we must possess a righteousness fully commensurate with the utmost demands of the whole law. But where will such a righteousness be found? No where but in the Lord Jesus Christ. Hence then is the necessity for fleeing to him, and laying hold on him, and casting ourselves altogether upon him, and embracing him as all our salvation, and all our desire. Understand this matter well, and the whole Gospel will be as clear as the meridian sun, and as acceptable as it would be to one already in hell.]

“HEAR this,” lastly, for the regulating of your entire conduct through life—

From the very moment that you turn to God, you must aspire after the attainment here enjoined, and be satisfied with nothing less. And, in order to this attainment, you must contemplate deeply and continually the excellencies of the Divine character, and the innumerable obligations which he has conferred upon you. Above all, you must have impressed upon your minds the wonderful love he has manifested towards you in the gift of his only dear Son to die for you. This will have a constraining influence over your whole man, and will progressively transform you into his blessed image in righteousness and true holiness.]

MCCCCL.

LOVE TO OUR NEIGHBOUR.

Mark xii. 31. *And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.*

A QUESTION had been put to our Lord, What was the first and great commandment? To this he had answered, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God." But, lest the Scribe should overlook his duties towards his neighbour, and plead perhaps the answer of Jesus as sanctioning such conduct, our Lord reminded him that there was another commandment, similar to that which he had already mentioned; namely, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

In discoursing upon this commandment, we shall shew,

I. What is the meaning of it—

Self-love is generally represented as a base affection of the mind; and doubtless it is so, as it exists in fallen man; because it is always inordinate, and excessive: but, as it existed in the heart of Adam in Paradise, it was a good disposition, and absolutely necessary for his well-being. It has even now its legitimate exercise; and when directed to its proper objects, and confined within its just bounds, it deserves our approbation, and affords a correct standard for our love towards others.

Agreeably to this idea, we should shew an affectionate regard to our neighbour,

1. In relation to his temporal welfare—

[If we were labouring under any bodily disease, or misfortune of any kind, we should wish our neighbour to sympathize with us, and if possible to relieve us. Such regard then should we shew to *his person*, participating his joys and sorrows, and, like the good Samaritan, exerting ourselves to the utmost for his good^a — — —

Towards *his property* also we should maintain the same disinterested regard. We would not that another person should

^a Luke x. 30—35.

“wrong or defraud us in any matter:” we should wish to find in all his dealings the strictest integrity. Such then should be our conduct in all our intercourse with him. We should take a lively interest in whatever relates to him, and rather suffer wrong ourselves, than commit the smallest trespass upon him^b — — —

We should extend our concern also to *his character*. We are extremely hurt if others take up prejudices against us, and listen to vague reports, and even by true representations lower us needlessly in the estimation of our fellow-creatures. We should therefore be candid in the construction which we put upon his actions; and be ever ready to cast a veil over his infirmities^c: we should “hope and believe all” the good of him that circumstances will admit of^d — — —

We should consult as much as possible *his peace and happiness*. There are innumerable ways in which others may grieve us without speaking any thing false, or doing any thing palpably unjust: and there are many ways in which they may promote the comfort of our minds. And there is no one who would not wish to see a benevolent disposition exercised towards him. Such then is the spirit which we should maintain towards others: we should seek our happiness in making others happy; and if necessitated to grieve them for their good, we should feel no rest in *our own* minds till it was restored to *theirs*^e — — —]

2. In relation to his spiritual welfare—

[Men, it is true, have but too little concern about their own souls: and therefore we must speak of the self-love that *ought* to exist within them, rather than of that which actually does exist. Suppose then a number of persons to be sensible of the value of their souls, and to be earnestly desirous of obtaining mercy; would they not wish that one, whom they thought capable of instructing them, should labour to promote their eternal interests? Would they not wish that he should cheerfully endure reproach, or indeed even risk his own life, in order to effect their everlasting salvation? Such then is the concern we should express for the salvation of others; we should “greatly long after them in the bowels of Christ^f;” we should “gladly spend and be spent for them, even though the more we loved them the less we were loved^g:” if we had a prospect of being “offered upon the sacrifice and service of their faith, we should consider it rather as a ground of congratulation and joy^h,” than of sorrow and condolence: yea, we should actually, if called to it, “lay down our lives for the brethrenⁱ.”

^b 1 Cor. vi. 7.

^c 1 Pet. iv. 8.

^d 1 Cor. xiii. 7.

^e 2 Cor. ii. 2.

^f Phil. i. 8.

^g 2 Cor. xii. 15.

^h Phil. ii. 17.

ⁱ 1 John iii. 16.

It appears indeed, at first sight, that the love here inculcated, is to be confined to those of our own community^k: but other passages in the same chapter prove, that it is to be extended even to strangers^l; and our Lord's illustration of it shews, that it must reach even to our enemies^m.]

Having, though very imperfectly, ascertained its meaning, let us proceed to inquire,

II. Wherein it resembles the foregoing commandment—

It is like the former,

1. In extent—

[The duty of loving God comprehends every action, word, and thought that relate to God: and as the first four commandments are contained in that, so every thing relating to our neighbour is included in the love which we should bear towards him. St. Paul enumerates not only the prohibitions of adultery, or murder, or theft, or perjury, as implied in this commandment, but even that prohibition which relates to the inmost emotions of the soul, "Thou shalt not covetⁿ." There is not a disposition of the mind towards our neighbour, which is not either a violation of this commandment, or a positive compliance with it — — —]

2. In excellence—

[What can be more excellent than love to God? It is the brightest ornament and perfection of our nature. Such is also the love of our neighbour. View it as it manifested itself in the Apostle Paul; and contrast the exercises of his mind with the selfishness which obtains in the world: how beautiful the one! how deformed the other! Let us only suppose all persons as studious to advance the interest of others, as they are to promote their own: let us suppose them as kind, as candid, as forbearing, as forgiving towards others, as they would wish others to be towards themselves: what a world would this be! it would be a very heaven upon earth — — — Truly, the commendation bestowed upon a compliance with this commandment^o, amply attests the mind of God respecting it — — —]

3. In importance—

[Without the love of God, all that we can possess is of no value. The same also may we say respecting the love of our neighbour. On it, no less than on the former, do the law and the prophets depend^p: without it, all our pretences to the

^k Lev. xix. 18. ^l Lev. xix. 33, 34. ^m Luke x. 29, 36, 37.

ⁿ Rom. xiii. 9, 10. ^o Jam. ii. 8. ^p Matt. 22—40.

love of God are vain^q. We may have the most eminent gifts, and appear to exercise the most distinguished graces, and after all be “nothing” in the sight of God, if we be not under the influence of this Divine principle^r. By this we fulfil the law^s; and therefore the want of it must constitute us transgressors of the deepest die — — —]

We may LEARN from hence,

1. How much we need a Saviour—

[Ignorant people not only reject the Gospel, but cut off also one half of the law, omitting what relates to God, and retaining only the duties of the second table. But we will suppose for a moment, that our duty to God is of no consideration; and that our duty to our neighbour comprehends all that we need regard; yet who will venture to rest his hopes upon this ground, that he has fulfilled his duty? Ah! we must be ignorant indeed, if we do not see that we have violated this commandment every day of our lives, and that “our mouths must be stopped as guilty before God.”

Put away then, my beloved brethren, your delusive hopes; and look for mercy through the merits of Him who fulfilled the law for you. It is through his vicarious sufferings that your selfishness must be pardoned^t; and through his obedience alone that you must find acceptance with God^u.]

2. How we may best approve ourselves to him who has become our Saviour—

[The fulfilling of this law is that which Christ regards as the most acceptable expression of our regard for Him. He has enforced it by new motives, and exemplified it in a new manner, and has taught us to consider our obedience to it as the best evidence of our sincerity. Behold, then, ye professors of religion, what ye have to do: get your self-love mortified, and your love to others strengthened and increased. Get your hearts enlarged towards enemies as well as friends (“for if ye love your friends only, what do ye more than others?”), and “let your love to them be without dissimulation.” There is indeed a peculiar love due to “the household of faith;” but though it should be superlatively exercised towards them, it should not be confined to them exclusively. Every human being should have an interest in your regards; and towards all, you should do as you would be done unto. Let this be the invariable rule of your conduct; so will you adorn your holy profession, and glorify your Father that is in heaven.]

^q 1 John iv. 20.

^r 1 Cor. xiii. 1—3.

^s Gal. v. 14.

^t 2 Cor. v. 21.

^u Rom. v. 19.

MCCCCLI.

EXCELLENCE OF THE MORAL LAW.

Mark xii. 32—34. *And the Scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God, and there is none other but he: and to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices. And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.*

IT is the Christian's duty to be ready at all times to "render a reason for the hope that is in him, with meekness and fear." But there are some situations wherein this is extremely difficult. If a person obviously come only to cavil, we cannot but be pained on his account; and we are apt to feel a degree of irritation also on our own. But we ought to be much on our guard against the smallest degree of asperity, lest we increase the prejudices which we should labour to subdue. It is true, we have not in such cases much prospect of success: but we learn from the instance before us, that we ought not to despair.

It was a question much agitated amongst the Jewish doctors, What was the first of all the commandments; whether that relating to circumcision, (whereby they were admitted into covenant with God,) or that which respected sacrifices, (whereby they obtained acceptance with God,) or that about the Sabbath, (whereby they honoured God in a more especial manner,) or that respecting their phylacteries, (whereby they kept up the daily and hourly remembrance of God in their minds; for on their phylacteries, or borders of their garments, they wrote passages of the law,) or finally, whether the moral law were not superior to the ceremonial altogether? The Scribe who proposed this question to our Lord, though less captious than those who had preceded him, was under the influence of an improper spirit: yet our Lord returned to him, as he had done to all the others, a plain and incontrovertible answer, and thereby not only convinced his judgment, but in a very considerable degree

conciliated his esteem, and disposed him for receiving further information.

The answer which our Lord gave to him has already been considered. That which we are now to attend to, is the Scribe's reply; which naturally suggests to us the following observations:

I. That the great practical duties of the law are supremely excellent—

The Scribe, not contented with the commendation bestowed upon the commandments by our Lord, gives them a decided preference to all the most sacred institutions of the Mosaic ritual: and in this he was perfectly correct: for, however excellent they were in their place, the love of God and our neighbour are of infinitely greater value.

1. The great practical duties of the law are good *for their own sake*; whereas the institutions of the ceremonial law were good only *as means to an end*—

[We must by no means depreciate the “burnt-offerings and sacrifices;” because they were the appointed means of reconciliation with God; they directed the attention of men to the great Sacrifice which was in due time to be offered; and they prepared the world for the coming of Christ. But still they had no intrinsic excellence: if separated from the ends of their institution, the blood of bulls and of goats was of no more value than “the cutting off a dog's neck, or the offering of swine's blood.”

But the love of God and our neighbour is really of inestimable value: it is the appropriate exercise of our faculties; and, if carried to the extent that is enjoined in the commandments, it would be an anticipation of heaven itself^a — — —]

2. The great practical duties of the law *can be performed only by a renewed heart*; whereas the institutions of the ceremonial law *may be performed by the most abandoned of mankind*—

[A wicked Balaam could offer sacrifices in abundance: but who can put forth all his intellectual and active powers in love to God and man? None, but he who has been renewed by the Spirit of God. It is not possible for an unregenerate man to offer such sacrifices as these: they are far too high, too pure, too spiritual: he may easily burn upon an altar the

^a See 1 Sam. xv. 22.

bodies of slain beasts; but he cannot “present his own soul a living sacrifice to God;” he cannot have *that* inflamed with the fire of divine love, unless he be regenerate and created anew in Christ Jesus — — —]

Respecting the practical duties of the law, we may farther observe,

II. That they are such as must commend themselves to the conscience of every candid inquirer—

To those who are blinded by prejudice and passion, the words of truth and soberness appear as folly and madness^b. But, as our Lord’s answer constrained the Scribe to confess that he had spoken truth, so must it prevail over every one that has a mind at all open to conviction. Let any one bring the great practical duties of the law to the test; let him propose as severe a test as he will; and we will venture to affirm, that the more they are scrutinized, the more excellent will they appear.

1. Are they reasonable?—YES.

[What can be more reasonable, than that we should love Him who is infinitely lovely, and who has so loved us as even to give his only dear Son to die for us? — — —]

2. Are they conducive to our happiness?—YES.

[Wherein does the happiness of heaven consist, but in the exercise of love? Conceive of the whole heart, and mind, and soul, and strength being occupied in love to God; and our neighbour being in all respects loved as ourselves, and treated by us in every thing, as in a change of circumstances we should wish him to treat us; must we not be happy? With every bad passion so subdued, and every Divine affection so exercised, we say again, could we fail of being happy? — — —]

3. Are they perfective of our nature?—YES.

[The want of love is that which debases us even lower than the beasts that perish. “The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib:” but we, with all our advantages, are blind to the highest excellency, insensible of the greatest obligations, and regardless of our best interests. No words can describe the full malignity of such a state. But let a principle of love possess our souls, and it instantly refines all our feelings,

^b Our Lord compares the attempting to instruct such persons, to a casting of pearls before swine, who will only turn again and rend us. Matt. vii. 6.

regulates all our dispositions, and transforms us into the very image of our God ——— More cannot be said in confirmation of this truth, than what St. John hath said, “God is love : and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him^c.”]

4. Are they instrumental to the honouring of God—YES.

[We know of no other way in which God can be honoured; because these two commandments comprehend the whole of our duty. But by abounding in a regard to these, we may, and do, honour him. This our Lord has plainly declared; “Herein is my Father glorified that ye bear much fruit.” By the preaching of his word, his name is known; but it is by the practical effects of that word upon the hearts and lives of his people, that his image is reflected, and the efficacy of his grace displayed — — —]

A candid mind, we have said, must acknowledge the excellency of duties which are capable of standing so severe a test : and, for the encouragement of such candour, we observe,

III. That an approbation of them argues a state of mind favourable to the reception of the Gospel—

When there is a readiness to approve the boundless extent of these commandments, there must of necessity be,

1. An openness to be convinced of our lost estate—

[It is an ignorance of the spirituality of the law, that causes men to deny their desert of God’s wrath and indignation. They think that a very small degree of love to God, and a very partial regard to their fellow-creatures, is the whole of their duty : and, if they have not violated the commandments by some gross and flagrant transgression, they imagine, like the Rich Youth in the Gospel, that they “have kept them all from their youth up.” But let a person once acknowledge it his bounden duty to love God with *all* his heart, and *all* his understanding, and *all* his soul, and *all* his strength, and to love his neighbour *in all things* as himself, and he can no longer resist the conclusion, that his whole life has been one continued act of sin ; for there has not been one day, one hour, one moment, wherein the frame of his mind has perfectly corresponded with the demands of the law. It was such a view of the law that made Paul confess himself a lost sinner, under a sentence of eternal condemnation ; and was the first thing which overcame his aversion to the Gospel^d.]

^c 1 John iv. 16.

^d Rom. vii. 9.

2. A willingness to embrace the offers of salvation—

[This necessarily follows from the former. A man, who feels himself perishing, cannot despise an offer of deliverance. One who had not committed homicide, might view a city of refuge with indifference; but one who saw the pursuer of blood close upon him, would flee to it with all his might — — —]

3. A readiness to receive and improve the aids of God's Spirit—

[No one can view the "exceeding breadth of these commandments," without feeling the impossibility of keeping them by any strength of his own. While he thinks the law extends no farther than to the outward act, he supposes himself capable of performing all that is required: but when he sees that it reaches to the heart, he is easily persuaded, that he needs the agency of God's Spirit to qualify him for a due discharge of his duty. He therefore will be glad to hear that God has "promised the Holy Spirit to them that ask him." He will think it no indignity to stand indebted to a Divine agency: on the contrary, while his approbation of the commandments inclines him to obey them, he will thankfully accept the proffered influences of the Spirit, and rejoice in the prospect of being "able to do all things through Christ who strengtheneth him."]

These things necessarily resulting from a just knowledge of the law, and being the characteristic marks of those who embrace the truth, they must needs be also good preparatives for the reception of the Gospel.

[Such was our Lord's judgment in reference to the Scribe, when he had heard his approbation of the moral law. And to every one who manifests such a disposition, we may say with our Lord, "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God."]

We shall now CONCLUDE with a word,

1. Of caution—

[Surely *they who indulge prejudices against the truth*, and cavil at the Gospel instead of embracing it, should well consider how awful their condition is: for if one who, like this Scribe, yields to conviction, and acknowledges that conviction before his ungodly companions, and exposes himself thereby to shame and reproach for conscience' sake, may yet be only near to the kingdom of God, and not a partaker of it, what must be the state of cavillers, and of those who reject the truth?

They also who approve of the truth in their hearts, and shew a decided regard for those who preach or profess it, should take care not to rest in such a state. For to what purpose is it to

be “not far from the kingdom of God,” if they be not afterwards brought into it? To what purpose is it to be “almost Christians,” if they do not become such *altogether*? To what purpose is it to have “a name to live,” if yet they continue “dead?” The Wise Virgins only, who had oil in their lamps, were admitted to the wedding-feast; the others who had the lamps without the oil, the appearance but not the reality of grace, were excluded from it. Alas! what a mortification must it be to such in the eternal world, to find that once they were not far from the kingdom, but that, after all, they fell short of a participation of it; that they dropped into hell, as it were, even from the gate of heaven! O! I would most earnestly caution you against sleeping in such imminent danger, and against resting in any thing short of a thorough conversion.]

2. Of encouragement—

[We trust there are many who, when they hear the demands of the law, and the declarations of the Gospel, are ready to say, “Well, Master, thou hast said the truth.” To such then we would address ourselves in the most encouraging terms; ye “are not far from the kingdom of God.” Only go on a little further, and you will be brought effectually into the kingdom. Seek to know the way of God more perfectly. Make your inquiries, if you will, provided you make them in a candid spirit. But endeavour to improve all opportunities of instruction. The word of God to you is, “Then shall ye know, if ye follow on to know the Lord.” Be thankful for the light ye enjoy, and for the smallest disposition to improve it. Take heed, however, that your knowledge lead you to Christ, and produce suitable effects upon your hearts and lives: so will you become members of Christ’s kingdom on earth, and finally be partakers of his heavenly kingdom.]

MCCCCLII.

NOT FAR FROM THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

Mark xii. 34. *And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.*

OUR blessed Lord has given us this caution: “Give not that which is holy unto dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine^a.” But, in following this suggestion, we must be careful not to judge precipitately,

^a Matt. vii. 6.

but to give to every one an opportunity, at least, to manifest the real dispositions of his mind. Such was our Lord's conduct, in relation to the different descriptions of persons who conversed with him. There came to him many who sought only to ensnare him, and "catch him in his words^b." They, however, put on an appearance of sincerity, and addressed him with great respect^c: and therefore, notwithstanding he saw through their design, he answered the questions which they proposed to him^d. After he had put both the Herodians and the Sadducees to silence, a Scribe from among the Pharisees, with no better intention than the former, put a question to him, though of a less ensnaring kind^e. This person seems to have been instigated by others, rather than to have followed the bent of his own mind: and the benefit of returning a courteous answer, even to captious inquiries, now strikingly appeared; for he was convinced by the instruction he received; and by shewing the docility of his own mind, he elicited from our Lord that gracious testimony, "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God."

It shall be my endeavour,

I. To confirm the declaration of our Lord—

The question asked by the Scribe was, "Master, which is the great commandment in the law?" Our Lord replied, That it was that which enjoined us to "love God with all our heart, and mind, and soul, and strength: and that the second was like unto it, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself^f." In this answer the Scribe fully acquiesced; and thereby he shewed, that "he was not far from the kingdom of God."

Now, observe what his acquiescence implied. It indicated,

1. Knowledge—

[This was a knowledge which was by no means common amongst the Scribes and Pharisees at that day. They laid a

^b ver. 13.

^c ver. 14.

^d ver. 15—17. and 18—27.

^e Compare Matt. xxii. 34—36.

^f ver. 28—31.

very undue stress upon outward rites and ceremonies; and upon circumcision in particular, (as many amongst ourselves do upon baptism,) as though *that* were of itself sufficient to secure a man's acceptance with God. The having of Abraham for their father, was, in their estimation, a sure title to heaven^g; whilst an obedience to the moral law was with them only a secondary concern. This Scribe, however, was better instructed. He saw that the requirements of the moral law were of primary and indispensable obligation; and that, without an obedience to them no person could have a well-grounded hope of God's favour.

Now then I say, that this degree of knowledge, deeply fixed in the mind, and openly avowed, is an excellent preparation for the kingdom which our blessed Lord came to establish upon earth. Where this measure of light exists in the soul, we cannot but hope that it shall be so augmented by the Gospel, as ultimately to guide a man into the way of peace.]

2. Candour—

[Our blessed Lord had *silenced* the former querists; but he had not so convinced them, as to elicit any approbation of his sentiments. They were too full of prejudice to make any such acknowledgment; and would have been glad enough to justify their own views, if they had known what reply to make. He, on the contrary, was open to conviction: he would not reject knowledge, because of the person by whom it was imparted; nor would he close his eyes, or shut his ears, because his instructor was a man hated and despised: he would receive truth from whatever quarter it came; and entertain it in his mind without jealousy and without fear.

What if the Gospel which we preach were so heard; and truth were thus freely suffered to make its way to the heart? Verily the kingdom of God would be far more enlarged amongst us, than ever it has yet been. And the same may be said of every place under heaven, where the Gospel is faithfully administered.]

3. Piety—

[There was not in this Scribe a mere acquiescence in the truth proposed to him, but a most cordial approbation of it. He dilates upon our Lord's words with evident pleasure; and adds to them, what was not necessarily required, a declaration, that those two commandments, of the supreme love to God, and of loving our neighbour as ourselves, were "more than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices." Now this was in the very teeth of all that the Pharisees maintained. There

^g Matt. iii. 9.

was among them, and there exists to a vast extent amongst ourselves, an idea, that if a man were punctually observant of all the rites and ceremonies of religion, he must of necessity be in a good state before God. But this Scribe justly sets down the outward observances of religion as of no account, if the person performing them be not animated by love to God and man. Rites and ceremonies are of no value, but as means to an end: whereas love is of infinite value, for its own sake: it is a conformity to God: it is the image of God upon the soul of man.

Now *this* the Scribe both saw and felt: and, wherever such a *feeling* is, verily the man may well be said to be “not far from the kingdom of God.”]

Taking, then, our Lord’s declaration as unquestionably true, I will proceed,

II. To found upon it some salutary advice—

I will address myself,

I. To those who answer to this character—

[There are many, and doubtless many here present, in whom is found a good measure of knowledge, and candour, and piety; whilst yet the best that can be said of them is, that “they are not far from the kingdom of God.”

It will be asked, of course, What are the defects of this character? and what needs to be superadded to it, in order to bring a man fully into the kingdom of God? I answer, There must be in him these three things: first, a sense of his undone state, on account of having violated this law; next, a dependence on the Lord Jesus Christ, as having fulfilled this law for us; and, lastly, a determination of heart, through grace, to fulfil it ourselves. Without the first of these, a broken and contrite spirit, whatever be a man’s other qualities, he is not yet upon the threshold of God’s sanctuary. Without the next, that is, faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, he has not knocked at the door; for “Christ is the door, through which alone any man can enter in^h.” And without the last, obedience to God’s commands, whatever his profession be, it is clear that he has not entered in at that door: for if he had, his faith would be demonstrated by his works.

Now, then, to the regular and well-disposed part of you, I would affectionately offer this advice: Take it not for granted that you are right before God; but weigh yourselves in the balance of the sanctuary, and search wherein it is that you are found wanting. Religion does not consist in knowledge nor in candour, nor in what I have ventured to call piety; by which I

^h John x. 9.

mean, an approbation of what is good: it consists in a thorough conversion of the soul to God, in a way of deep penitence, and simple faith, and unreserved obedience: and till these be found in you really, deeply, abidingly, you are not really partakers of the kingdom of God. You may be “not far from it;” but you are not *in* it; nor do the blessings of it belong to you. I pray you, mistake not the appearance of religion for the reality; nor ever rest till you have attained a clear, decisive evidence that you are indeed the Lord’s.]

2. To those who have not even attained this character—

[How many are there that are yet full of ignorance, and prejudice, and aversion to the truth! — — — What, then, must I say of *you*? Can I administer to you the encouragement which our Lord gave to the inquiring Scribe? Must I not rather say, that you are far from the kingdom of God? and if you are *far* from *that* kingdom, consider, I pray you, to what kingdom you are *near*; even to the kingdom of darkness, the kingdom of the wicked one? I grieve to suggest to any of you so painful a thought: but I appeal to you, whether your state be not one of extreme danger: for if, whilst possessing all that this Scribe possessed, you may yet have no part in the Gospel kingdom, it surely becomes you to tremble at your state, and to cry mightily to God, if peradventure you may at last find admission into it, and be saved for ever. Possibly this counsel may be neglected by you, as that of Christ was by the Pharisees of old. But judge ye in what light they *now* view their past obduracy. But their weeping now is of no avail. I pray God that you, my brethren, may now improve the opportunity afforded you, and may seek the Lord whilst he *may* be found, and call upon him whilst he is near.]

3. To those who are really admitted into the Redeemer’s kingdom—

[See how to act towards those who are yet without. “Be always ready to give to every one that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fearⁱ.” And be particularly careful to encourage good appearances wherever you may find them. Our blessed Lord, looking upon the Young Man in the Gospel, “*loved him* ;” notwithstanding he knew, that, when his professions should be put to the test, they would be found delusive^k. And *this* is to be a pattern for us. What if our Lord, who knew the *design* of this Scribe, had given him a repulse at first, instead of answering his question? The man would have been hardened in his wickedness;

ⁱ 1 Pet. iii. 15.

^k Mark x. 21, 22.

instead of being, as we would fondly hope he was, brought effectually into the kingdom of God. Learn, then, tenderness towards such characters; and “instruct in meekness them that oppose themselves; if God peradventure may give them repentance to the acknowledgment of the truth; and they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, by whom they are led captive at his will¹.”

At the same time, shew to all around you what it is to be really partakers of Christ's kingdom. Shew by your life and conversation what the character of his subjects is; and seek to be daily growing in a meetness for that kingdom which awaits you at your departure hence. Determine, through grace, that “having a promise of entering into God's rest, nothing shall induce you to come short of it.” Think what a terrible disappointment it must be to any soul to find itself *not far from* the kingdom of God, and yet *not in* it; and to fall from the very gates of heaven into the bottomless abyss of hell. Determine, I say, that nothing shall divert you from your course, or retard you in it: but that, with God's help, you will “so run as to obtain the prize.”]

¹ 2 Tim. ii. 25, 26.

MCCCCLIII.

THE WIDOW'S MITE.

Mark xii. 41—44. *And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much. And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast more in than all they which have cast into the treasury: for all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.*

THE morality of the Gospel is applauded by most: yet there are few who do not, by their explanations and comments, deprive it of half its excellence. The “turning of the left cheek to him who has smitten us on the right;” the “surrendering of our cloak to him who has already taken away our coat;” the “forgiving of an offending brother, not only seventy times, but seventy times seven;” these, and other precepts of a sublime import, are reduced to little more than an

abstinence from revenge; so anxious are men to reduce the Scripture to their own practice, rather than to elevate their practice to the standard of God's word. The same would be done in reference to the great duty of liberality; but happily an example is set before us which cannot possibly be explained away. Had the conduct of this poor widow been merely set forth in a way of precept, instead of being exhibited in actual life, it would have shared the fate of those other precepts, and have been pared down to a general commendation of self-denying charity. But here is no opportunity afforded us for talking about Eastern metaphors, and figurative expressions; here is a plain simple fact, decidedly approved by Him who cannot err; and consequently, it may be regarded as an illustrious example, which, as far as we may be in similar circumstances, we shall do well to follow.

Let us consider,

I. Our Lord's commendation of the widow—

[In the temple there was a treasury, where all who felt their hearts disposed to make a voluntary offering to the Lord, were enabled to do it: and the money so collected was expended in the service of the sanctuary, either in sacrifices that were to be offered, or in the wood, and salt, and other things necessary for the offering of them. Depraved as that generation was, the custom of contributing freely for these purposes very generally prevailed: it seems, that "the people" in general, and not merely a few liberal individuals, "cast in" their contributions. *Many* that were rich contributed *largely*: but a poor widow, who possessed only a single farthing in the world, gave *that*, even "all her living."

Now it may well be doubted whether there be a man upon earth who would not have disapproved of this act, if our Lord himself had not expressly commended it: they would have blamed it as *unnecessary*, as *useless*, as *presumptuous*: *unnecessary*, because God could not require any offering at the hands of one who was so indigent; *useless*, because a farthing towards the expenses of the temple was literally no more than a drop in the ocean; and *presumptuous*, because to cast away her *all*, was to tempt God, and to expect a further supply from him, when she was throwing away the supply he had already afforded her.

But our blessed Lord took pains, (if we may so speak,) to express his approbation of it. "He called his Disciples to

him," to inform them of it, and to declare to them his sentiments respecting it. We do not apprehend that he knew the circumstances from any conversation he had had with her: he had no need to be informed by others, because he himself was omniscient: and he declared without hesitation, that this donation of hers, small as it might appear, and highly indiscreet, was indeed both *great* and *good*: it was *great*, inasmuch that it exceeded all the accumulated presents of the rich who had contributed; since they had only given *a part* of their property, "out of *their abundance*;" whereas "she, of *her want*, had given *all* that she possessed, even *all her living*:" it was also *good*, because she had given it with a single eye to the glory of God; and God, who knew the motive by which she had been actuated, accepted it as "an offering of a sweet-smelling savour."]

Let us now turn our attention to,

II. The instruction to be gathered from it—

Among many other lessons we may learn from it,

1. How to estimate charity—

[We are apt to estimate it by the amount that is given on any occasion: but this affords no proper criterion for judging of real charity: *that* must be judged of, first, by the proportion which the donation bears to the ability of the donor; and, next, by the disposition and design of him that gives it. Donations that are large in the actual amount, may yet be small, when taken in connexion with the donor's opulence: whilst the smallest gifts, as in the instance before us, may be truly great, on account of the indigence of him that bestows them. This is told us by St. Paul, who says, that "God accepts them according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not^a:" if only there "be a willing mind," the amount of the gift makes no difference in his eyes^b. That which gives every thing its chief value is, its being done with an unfeigned desire to please and honour him. Without that we may give all our goods to feed the poor, and yet have not one atom of that charity which will be approved of our God^c.]

2. How to practise it—

[Much was there in the conduct of that poor widow that is deserving of imitation. We should dispense our charity *secretly*. We are well assured, that there was nothing of ostentation in her upon this occasion; else our Lord would not have bestowed such commendation upon her. She wanted none to be spectators of her liberality; it was sufficient for

^a 2 Cor. viii. 12.

^b 2 Cor. viii. 12.

^c 1 Cor. xiii. 1—3.

her that God was privy to it. Thus “our left hand should not know what our right hand doeth.” There are occasions indeed, when, for the sake of example, it is necessary that our liberality should be known: but, when that is not the case, we should rather affect privacy, and be satisfied with approving ourselves to God.

We should also dispose of our money *cheerfully*. She needed not to be urged to it: she was happy in serving God^d: and doubtless, instead of imagining him indebted to her for any service she could render, she considered herself infinitely indebted to him for the disposition he had given her.

We should also impart *liberally* of what we possess. If any be disposed to set aside her example as singular, and not intended for our imitation, we appeal to similar conduct in the Churches of Macedonia; where, in the midst of *deep poverty*, they abounded unto the *riches of liberality*; and gave, not only according to their power, but even beyond their power, being willing of themselves, and praying the Apostle with much entreaty to be the distributor of their alms^e. We may indeed be foolishly prodigal in giving where the occasion does not require it: but, if we have really an eye to the honour of God, we need fear no excess. Many may proudly *talk* of giving their *mite*; but we shall not find many that will really do it: but the more we can deny ourselves for God, the more acceptably shall we serve him.]

3. How to act on the present occasion^f—

^d “Ready . . . willing.” See 1 Tim. vi. 18. and 2 Cor. ix. 7.

^e 2 Cor. viii. 2—4.

^f If this be the subject of a *Charity Sermon*, a comparison may here be instituted, between the occasions for exertion; and the urgency of the particular occasion be insisted on. It may also be stated, that, if carnal sacrifices were offered to God by means of the contributions in the one case, the spiritual sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving will abound in the other. It may also be suggested, that the Lord Jesus has his eye upon the treasury, and is observant of every one, to mark, both what he gives, and by what motive he is actuated: and that he will bear testimony to our liberality in the day of judgment, and confer on us a reward proportioned to it. 2 Cor. ix. 6.

MCCCCLIV.

THE DUTY OF WATCHFULNESS ENFORCED.

Mark xiii. 32—36. *But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father. Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye*

know not when the time is. For the Son of Man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning: lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping.

ON different occasions, but especially at the close of his life, our Lord taught his Disciples to look forward to a future period, when he would assuredly come again. He specified two objects for which he would come; the one was, to destroy Jerusalem; and the other, to judge the world: and, inasmuch as the former of these advents was typical of the other, he blended them both together, and thereby raised in them an expectation that they should take place at the same time. The truth is, that though the one was accomplished within forty years, and the other, notwithstanding almost eighteen hundred years have already past, remains yet to be accomplished at some distant and unknown period, they are both equally present in the mind of God, “with whom a thousand years are as one day, and one day as a thousand years.” And it is also true, that the day of death is to every man, *in effect*, as the day of judgment: so that the union of the two periods in their minds, notwithstanding their distance from each other, was strictly just, as it respected God, and highly salutary as it respected them. Not but that our Lord did make a clear distinction between the two periods: for in ver. 30, he says, “This generation shall not pass till all *these things* (relative to the destruction of Jerusalem) be done; and then, in a way of contrast, he adds, “But of *that day and that hour*, namely, the Day of Judgment, knoweth no man.” It is in reference to this latter period that he speaks in the words of our text; in discoursing on which we shall consider,

I. The duty inculcated—

Watchfulness and prayer are often united in the Holy Scriptures as duties of the first importance. In themselves they are different; but in their

exercise they are inseparable: neither would be of any avail without the other: prayer without watchfulness would be hypocritical; and watchfulness without prayer, presumptuous. We shall therefore combine the duties, as though it had been said, *Watch in the exercise of prayer*. And that we may yet further simplify the subject, we shall not enter into a detail of particulars, but rather follow the general ideas of our text; and shew,

1. What we should watch and pray *against*—

[Here we must include *every thing which has a tendency to lull us asleep*. We see how intent men are on all the things of time and sense: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, so occupy them, that they find no time nor inclination for spiritual concerns — — —

Against these then we should “watch and pray:” we should watch, to prevent them from gaining an ascendant over our hearts; and cry mightily to God to keep us from yielding to their influence. Seeing how the whole world is led captive by them, we should tremble for ourselves; and day and night intreat God rather to leave us destitute of all earthly things, than to give us over to the love of them, or suffer them to deprive us of eternal happiness — — —]

2. What we should watch and pray *for*—

[*To be found ready, at whatever moment our Lord shall call for us*, should be the one object of our ambition. With this view, we should seek to be found in Christ, not having our own righteousness, but that which is of God through faith in Christ. Not content with a general hope of acceptance through Christ, we should wash our every sin, yea our every duty also, in the fountain of his blood, which must cleanse us from the “iniquity even of our holiest actions.” We should seek also to “be renewed in the spirit of our minds,” and to be transformed into “the image of our God in righteousness and true holiness.” No attainments should ever satisfy us: if we were as holy as Paul himself, we should, like him, “forget the things that are behind, and reach forward towards that which is before.” With a view to progressive holiness, we should carefully “abide in Christ,” “living by faith on him,” and receiving daily out of his fulness grace for grace: assured, that without him we can do nothing, but through him shall be enabled to do all things. In a word, we should seek to be ever ready to meet our God; yea, to be “looking for, and hasting unto the coming of that day,” when we shall be summoned to his tribunal, and receive our eternal doom — — —

For the attainment of this happy frame of mind, we should be watching our progress in the Divine life, and praying day and night *to God* to perfect in us the work that he has begun — — —]

Let us next attend to,

II. The considerations with which it is enforced—

These may be comprehended in the two following:

1. The uncertainty of the time when our Lord shall call us—

[The time of the general judgment is unknown to the holy angels; nor was it revealed even to the Messiah himself for the purpose of communicating it to us^a. And there was good reason why it should be concealed; because if it had been represented as at a great distance of time, men might have become secure; whereas the idea of its speedy arrival tended to quicken all to holy exertion. In like manner the uncertainty of the time of our death has a very salutary effect; since it necessitates us to be always ready. The idea of a man going a long journey, and leaving his servants their appointed work, and ordering them to expect him every moment till they see him, justly illustrates this point. There is not a moment of our lives when we may sit down secure. The night was divided into four watches, which terminated at evening, at midnight, at the cock-crowing, and in the morning. Now at no one of these periods are we sure that we shall not be summoned into the presence of our God.

What a consideration is this to enforce the duty in our text! Who that reflects one moment on the possibility of his being called this night to the judgment-seat of Christ, must not desire to be found in the exercise of watchfulness and prayer? — — —]

2. The awfulness of being found in a sleeping state—

[In the parable of the Ten Virgins we are informed what we must assuredly expect, if we indulge in careless security; we shall be shut out from the marriage-supper of our Lord, and be “cast into outer darkness, where is weeping and gnashing of teeth.” It will be to no purpose to plead, that we were not engaged in any wicked projects. We were “slothful servants,” and therefore are justly regarded as “wicked:” we were unprepared, and therefore are justly cut off from all further opportunity to prepare for our great account; we treated heaven with contempt, and therefore we are consigned to the miseries of hell — — —

^a As God, one with the Father, he knew all things; but as the Mediator, he received his instructions from the Father, and delivered nothing but what he had before received. John xiv. 31. Rev. i. 1.

Who that contemplates these tremendous consequences, must not determine with God's help to watch and pray through the whole remainder of his days? — — —]

Our Lord's concluding admonition, "What I say unto you I say unto all, Watch," will lead us to ADDRESS some different descriptions of persons :

1. The old—

[Is so much of your time gone, and will you not improve the remainder? — — —]

2. The young—

[What security have you against death, that you should delay so necessary a work? — — —]

3. The afflicted—

[God sends you afflictions on purpose to awaken you from your slumbers, and to stir you up to heavenly pursuits : What an aggravation will it be of your guilt, if these dispensations pass away unimproved !]

4. The backslidden—

[What an awful thing is it, that, instead of having advanced in the Divine life, you have lost in a good measure the life which you once had ! Attend to God's admonition to the Church of Sardis, lest he execute upon you the judgment that he threatened to inflict on them^b — — —]

5. The more steadfast Christian—

[Experience proves that the exhortation to "watch" is not less necessary for you than for others. How many who are on the whole pious, grieve, by their unwatchfulness, their Divine Master ! Be on your guard against such a slothful way of seeking him as his Bride was found guilty of^c ; nor think to justify your sloth by such frivolous excuses as were urged by her^d. If you act like her, like her you will reap the bitter fruits in the hidings of his face^e. To you then no less than to others I would say, "Sleep not as do others, but watch and be sober^f."]]

^b Rev. iii. 2, 3.

^c Cant. iii. 1.

^d Cant. v. 2, 3.

^e Cant. iii. 1—4. and v. 2—6.

^f 1 Thess. v. 6—8.

MCCCCLV.

WE SHOULD WATCH FOR OUR LORD'S SECOND COMING.

Mark xiii. 37. *What I say unto you I say unto all, Watch.*

GOD is pleased to speak to us, not only in his word, but by the dispensations of his providence.

Calamities, whether foreign or domestic, whether public or personal, are sent by him to awaken our drowsy consciences, and to stir us up to a remembrance of our latter end. By all of them, whether menaced only, or actually inflicted, he addresses us, as Jesus did his Disciples (whom he had forewarned of the evils coming upon Jerusalem, and hereafter also upon the whole world), "Watch therefore, for ye know not when the Master of the house cometh."

On a subject like this we should in vain attempt to speak any thing new. But though we may do no more than remind you of truths with which you are already well acquainted, it will not be unprofitable for me to suggest to your thoughts,

I. The uncertainty of the time when our Lord will come to judgment—

[Our Lord, in illustrating what he had been speaking respecting the day of judgment, compares himself to a master leaving his house, and appointing his servants their work, and commanding his porter to watch, in order to admit him without delay at whatever moment he should return. He represents the precise time of his return to judgment as unknown to men, or angels, or even to himself; (so far at least, that the Holy Spirit, by which he was anointed to his prophetic office, had not communicated it to him as any part of the revelation which he was to make known to men;) and from thence inculcates the necessity of incessant watchfulness. Now, as the time of death is to us the commencement of our eternal state, and as it is equally unknown to us as the judgment itself, we shall direct our attention more particularly to that.

But what shall we say on such a subject as this? It needs neither proof nor elucidation: nor can any words make the uncertainty of life more evident, than the observation and experience of every man have already made it. We appeal to your observation of what takes place around you: does not our Lord call men to death and judgment at every age, and often when his summons is least expected? — — — We appeal to your experience: can you not recal to your minds many accidents which might have proved fatal? and do you not see, that you are yet liable every day and hour to be taken away by disease or accident? — — —]

Instead of dwelling on so obvious a truth, we will endeavour to point out,

II. Our duty arising from this consideration—

Thrice in the space of a few verses does our Lord repeat the same injunction, “Watch^a.” To enforce this, we would say,

1. Expect the second coming of your Lord—

[Put not from you, as you are too apt to do, the thoughts of death and judgment, but cherish them in your minds, and labour to get them impressed upon your hearts. Reflect upon their *uncertainty*, as to the precise period of their arrival, their *nearness*, their *awfulness*; and keep yourselves, as it were, in the daily and hourly expectation of them — — —]

2. Prepare to meet him—

[Two things are indispensable for all who would behold his face in peace, namely, “repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.” These must be experienced by you — — — neither the one nor the other can be dispensed with — — — Get a deep repentance therefore, and a lively faith: and rest not in any state short of that which the Scriptures require, and the primitive Christians actually attained.]

3. Guard against any measure of drowsiness which may interrupt or render doubtful your preparation for him—

[It will be a fearful thing if the Master of the house “should find you sleeping.” Yet who amongst us is not apt at times to be “weary in well-doing?” “The Wise Virgins, as well as the Foolish, slumbered and slept:” yea, even the Apostles slept, when our Lord had bidden them watch. We should therefore “exhort one another daily, and so much the more as we see the day approaching:” and, instead of giving way to sloth, should use all possible means, to “strengthen the things which remain that are ready to die.”]

ADDRESS—

1. The careless—

[How many continue such in spite of all the warnings which they have received from sickness in themselves, or the sudden deaths of others! But what will they think of their conduct, when once they are taken hence? If any one of us knew that a thief would certainly come this very night to break into his house, would he lay himself down to sleep as at other times? Should we not watch, and use our utmost efforts to frustrate his designs^b? Why then do we not act thus in

^a See ver. 33.

^b Matt. xxiv. 43.

reference to our souls? Are our souls of less value than our property, or the concerns of time than those of eternity? Are not the consequences of unwatchfulness sufficiently awful^e? And is not our real danger increased, rather than diminished, in proportion to our security^d? To every one then who is unconcerned about his eternal state, and unprepared to meet his God, we address the reproof which even heathen mariners gave to a prophet of the Lord? “What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise and call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon thee, and thou perish not^e.”]

2. The half-awakened—

[Pardon the term: it is but too appropriate to the states of many, who, if good wishes would carry them to heaven, would not come short of it; but, when God calls them to run, and strive, and wrestle, and fight, will not exert themselves in the way that he requires. Nevertheless God’s word is true; “The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force:” “Many shall *seek* to enter in, and shall not be able:” none shall succeed but those who “*strive*.” Guard then against the fate of the Foolish Virgins, who were not aware of their want of divine grace, till it was too late to obtain it^f. Let the Apostle’s exhortation sink down into your ears^g, and adopt instantly the resolution of the prophet, “I will stand upon my watch-tower, and will watch to see what God will say to me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved^h.”]

3. The professing people of God—

[Think not yourselves above the exhortation in our text: “What we say unto some, we must say unto *all*, Watch.” See what a caution our blessed Lord addressed to his own Apostlesⁱ: and then say, whether *any* caution can be too strong for *you*. Many who have appeared to run well, have turned back again; and not a few have died without ever returning to the good way from which they have departed. Be ye then on your guard, “lest, having known the way of righteousness, ye turn from the Holy Commandment delivered unto you.” Beware of imitating the slothful conduct of the Spouse in Solomon’s Song, lest, like her, you provoke your heavenly Friend to depart from you^k. Watch unto prayer with habitual persevering earnestness^l. You know the truths we have insisted on; act therefore agreeably to them, and to

^o Matt. xxiv. 48—51.

^e Jonah i. 6.

^g Rom. xiii. 11—14.

^l Luke xxi. 34—36.

¹ Eph. vi. 18.

^d 1 Thess. v. 3. Prov. vi. 9—11.

^f Matt. xxv. 8—13.

^h Hab. ii. 1.

^k Cant. iii. 1. and v. 2—6.

your holy profession^m. “Have your loins continually girt, and your lamps trimmed, and yourselves as those who wait for the coming of their Lordⁿ.”]

^m 1 Thess. v. 2, 4—8.

ⁿ Supposing this were a *Funeral Sermon* for a truly pious person, some little mention of his character might be made here.

MCCCCLVI.

COMMENDATION OF MARY'S LOVE.

Mark xiv. 8. *She hath done what she could.*

OCCASIONS sometimes arise, wherein it is difficult to discern the precise line of conduct we should pursue. In a season of public festivity, for instance, or on account of some domestic occurrences, we may be called to unite in feasting, and perhaps to incur considerable expence in providing entertainments for others: and a doubt may well arise in our minds, how far we ought to countenance such proceedings, and whether we ought not rather to save our money for the support of the poor. But we must not expect to have our path so clearly marked, but that there shall be abundant room left for difference of opinion in such things. All that seems practicable is, to lay down general principles, and to view the Lord Jesus Christ as an example best fitted to assist us in the application of them. There certainly are times, when, according to our rank and station in life, we should “be given to hospitality and unite in “rendering honour to whom honour is due.” Yet we have need, on the other hand, to guard against the indulgence of an ostentatious or worldly spirit. To lean to the side of moderation is undoubtedly the safer plan: nevertheless, when just occasions present themselves, there is a liberality that well befits the Christian character.

We read in the preceding context that a feast was made for our Lord in the house of Simon, the leper; and that Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead,

was one of the guests invited to meet him. Our Lord did not refuse to sanction a feast prepared for his sake: nor, when Mary, the sister of Lazarus, manifested her regard for him in a way that had an appearance of extravagance, did he condemn her for it: on the contrary, he judged that it was suited to the occasion; and therefore he vindicated her from the uncharitable censures which his own Disciples passed upon her, and declared his decided approbation of what she had done.

We propose to consider,

I. The act commended—

There are two points of view in which this may be considered:

1. As retrospective—

[The act itself was this. Whilst Jesus reclined at the table, Mary came with “an alabaster-box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head, and on his feet; and then wiped his feet with her hair.”

Now in this act she had respect to all the kindness which the Lord Jesus Christ had shewn both to her and to her family. He had favoured them with a more peculiar intimacy, and had testified on many occasions a pre-eminent regard for them. The opportunities thus offered them for spiritual good, had been improved by all of them, but especially by Mary. When Martha had studied chiefly to shew respect by external services, Mary had been intent on acquiring good to her soul from his instructive discourses; and, on being blamed by Martha for neglect of duty, she was applauded by her Lord for having “chosen a better part, which should never be taken away from her.”

But there was one mercy in particular which she had received from the Lord Jesus, and which had filled her soul with the profoundest gratitude. Her brother Lazarus had been raised by him from the dead. Jesus had not indeed come to them so speedily as they had wished; but this delay gave him an opportunity to display towards them in a more abundant measure the riches of his grace, and the all-sufficiency of his power. He expressed his sympathy with them under their affliction; and taught them to expect from him not only the restoration of their departed brother, but the everlasting salvation of their own souls^a — — —

^a John xi. 25, 26.

How to requite all this kindness she knew not, but what she could do, she most gladly did; and, without any fear of the uncharitable constructions that were likely to be put upon her conduct, as ostentatious, obtrusive, prodigal, she determined to honour him before all to the utmost of her power.]

2. As prospective—

[We do not apprehend that Mary herself had any idea of confirming our Lord's assertions respecting his approaching death. But as the prophets of old were inspired by the Spirit of God to speak things which they themselves did not understand^b, and as Caiaphas, the high-priest, had very recently foretold (though unintentionally and without the remotest conception of the meaning of his own words) the glorious ends that should be accomplished by the death of Christ^c; so Mary, though unconscious of it herself, predicted by this act the death and resurrection of her beloved Lord. It was common among the Jews to embalm the bodies of their departed friends: but there would be no time allowed for such tokens of respect from the friends of Jesus: for he would not be taken down from the cross till the Sabbath was nearly arrived; and on the Sabbath no such work could by the Jewish law be performed; and at the earliest dawn of the third day Jesus was to rise: Jesus therefore construed this action of Mary's as a preparation for his funeral, and as a performance of a rite, which could not otherwise have been performed at all^d. This, we acknowledge, was not intended by herself; but it was designed and overruled by God; who by this significant emblem foreshewed the very events which in a few days were fully accomplished.]

Such was the act: let us next consider,

II. The commendation given it—

The Disciples blamed it as an act of extravagance and waste: and thinking lightly of the honour done to their Master, reflected only on the loss sustained by the poor; since if it had been sold and given to them, it would have provided relief for many^e. The person who first raised the objection was Judas, who, being a thief and carrying the bag, would have alienated the money to his own use. He being disappointed of his prey, pretended to feel for the poor; (for the worst of men will profess a regard for virtue, when their only object is to condemn and obstruct its

^b 1 Pet. i. 11.

^c John xi. 49—52.

^d See the words immediately following the text.

^e It was worth about ten pounds of our money.

exercise;) and the rest of the Apostles too readily adopted his views; so prone are even the best of men to adopt uncharitable sentiments, rather than be at the pains to make a full inquiry into the things which they condemn. But our blessed Lord, who knew the pious dispositions of her heart, proceeded,

1. To vindicate the act—

[“She hath wrought a good work upon me,” says our Lord. If acts of charity are not to be omitted, so neither are acts of piety. “The poor are always with us; and we have opportunities of doing them good at all times:” we may be, and *we ought to be*, in the daily habit of administering to their wants, and consulting their welfare. But there are occasions that call for particular exertions: occasions which have more especial respect to the glory of God, and the honour of the Lord Jesus; (such as the dispersion of the Holy Scriptures, and the conversion of Jews and Gentiles to the faith of Christ;) and to these we should lend our aid with more than usual liberality, even though we should thereby contract our ability to relieve the temporal wants of men; for though we are certainly to do the latter, yet we must on no account leave the former undone. It is a very erroneous idea that our fellow-creatures only are to occupy our regard. Is God to have no appropriate token of our love? Are the wonders of redemption so insignificant, that they call for no expressions of gratitude on our part? So far are these considerations from deserving only a subordinate place in our esteem, that they should operate as the leading motive in all our exertions for the poor; and whatever we do, we should do it as “constrained by the love of Christ,” and “with a view to his glory.”]

2. To applaud the agent—

[Greater commendation could not be bestowed than that which is contained in our text; “She hath done what she could.” An angel from heaven could in that respect have done no more. David’s desire to build the temple, and his endeavour to make preparations for it, were as acceptable to God as the actual erection of it by Solomon. And the widow, who gave two mites, not only equalled, but far exceeded the liberality of the rich, though it is confessed that “they cast in much into the treasury^f.” And thus it is with us, whether we possess ten talents, or only one, if only we labour to improve what we have, “it shall be accepted according to what a man hath, and not according to what he hath not^g.”]

^f Mark xii. 42—44.

^g 2 Cor. viii. 12.

Not content with applauding her at the moment, he ordained that this act of hers should be recorded in his Gospel, and continue to be held up to the admiration of mankind even to the end of the world^h. But was this memorial of her to be recorded solely for her honour? No: as the record of Abraham's faith being counted to him for righteousness, was not made for his sake only, but for ours also, to whom a similar faith would be productive of similar benefitsⁱ, so this piety of Mary's was recorded, not for her sake only, but to *stimulate* and *encourage* us to an imitation of it.

It should *stimulate* us. We should consider that there is one great object which we should ever propose to ourselves through life; and that is, to serve and honour the Lord Jesus Christ. We should consider also that there is one only measure in which we should seek to effect that object; and that is, to the utmost extent of our ability. We should never think of what we *have done*, but of what we *can do*; nor account any thing done, whilst any thing remains to be done. Our daily and hourly inquiry should be, "What shall I render unto the Lord, for all the benefits that he hath done unto me?" We should be as ingenious to devise plans of honouring him, as we should be diligent in the execution of them: and "whatever our hand findeth to do, we should do it with all our might."

Moreover, it should *encourage* us. We are apt to think, that because we can do but little for the Lord, it is in vain to attempt any thing. But we are *in this respect* all upon a level: the poorest, the weakest, the meanest may do *what they can*; and the greatest of mankind can do no more. What an encouraging thought is this! how justly may it banish all those painful feelings which we are apt to indulge, and call forth into action every energy we possess! What though I cannot govern kingdoms for him, or go forth with apostolic zeal to preach his Gospel? What though I have no wealth, no talent, no influence to cast into his treasury? I have my mite, and he will graciously accept it. I may give him at least the affections of my soul: and if I pour them forth in his house, or at his table, or in my secret chamber, he will smell as sweet an odour, as incense or sacrifice ever yet afforded him. If then we have nothing else to give him, let us *spiritually* adopt, as Mary did, the resolution of the Spouse in the Song of Solomon; "While the king sitteth at his table, my spikenard sendeth forth the smell thereof^k."] 8

We would ADDRESS a few words,

1. To those who assume this character to themselves—

^h ver. 9.

ⁱ Rom. iv. 22—25.

^k Cant. i. 12.

[Nothing is more common than to hear persons assert, that "they do all they can:" nay, many found on this very thing their hopes of acceptance with God. But this is dreadful presumption in any one, and more especially in those who are most forward to arrogate this character to themselves. Indeed the assumption of this character, whilst we found our hopes upon it, is a contradiction in terms: for to found our hopes upon any thing that we can do, is to exclude Christ from his office as a Saviour, and to dishonour him to the utmost of our power. Moreover, if those who look with such complacency on their own actions, would inquire, What exertions they have made to honour Christ, it is to be feared that a few unmeaning ceremonies, or actions, that required neither self-denial nor zeal, would be found to constitute the whole of their boasted service. Let such persons then remember the caution given us by St. Paul, that "not he that commendeth himself is approved of God, but he whom the Lord commendeth¹."]]

2. To those who are aspiring after it—

[Those who will be zealous for their Lord must expect discouragements, and that too, not only from the ungodly, who will be sure to put a bad construction on their actions, but even from many well-meaning, or even pious persons, who will misinterpret their designs. If the very same occurrence were to take place at this very hour, under precisely the same circumstances, there are few of the Lord's Disciples who would be able to appreciate it aright: few would have such an exalted view of Christ's dignity and glory, as to see that a concern for that ought to swallow up every other consideration. One would accuse her of extravagance, another of bold obtrusiveness; and the more favourable, who gave her credit for pious intentions, would blame her enthusiastic ardour and needless singularity. But, beloved, be not discouraged by such things. I would not indeed recommend you to act in a way that should give unnecessary offence either to the world or to the Church of God: but on the other hand, I would not recommend you to have such a respect to the opinions of men, as to moderate your exertions in the cause of Christ, to please them. What though Mary was condemned, not only by vile hypocrites, like Judas, but even by the Apostles themselves; who does not envy her the approbation of her Lord? Who does not see in this memorial of her an ample recompence for the temporary obloquy that she sustained? And who that reflects on the reward that she is now receiving in heaven, does not see the blessedness of discarding the fear of man, and of

¹ 2 Cor. x. 18.

living unto God? Let us then endeavour to approve ourselves to our all-seeing and ever-adorable Saviour. Let us guard against entertaining uncharitable thoughts either of those who fall short of us, or those who go beyond us, in acts of love to him. We all have our different views, different tempers, different tastes. Both Martha and Mary sought to honour him; the one in laborious service, the other in pious adoration; and both were accepted in what they did. Let us then "*do what we can*;" and strive to honour him in the way best suited to our capacities and talents: and, as he has poured out his soul unto death for us," let us be ready at all times to sacrifice for him our name, our property, our life.]

MCCCCLVII.

THE SELF-DIFFIDENCE OF THE APOSTLES.

Mark xiv. 17—19. *And in the evening he cometh with the twelve. And as they sat and did eat, Jesus said, Verily I say unto you, One of you which eateth with me shall betray me. And they began to be sorrowful, and to say unto him one by one, Is it I? and another said, Is it I?*

EVERY particular relative to the sufferings of our blessed Lord was the subject of prophecy. The Psalmist, in different parts of his inspired compositions, specifies many minute occurrences which should take place at the time of our Saviour's death. In some of his expressions, the primary reference is to himself; in others, he refers to the Messiah alone. The passage to which there is an allusion in our text is of the former kind. It evidently is applicable, in the first instance, to David, whose life was sought by his friend Ahithophel^a. But, inasmuch as David was an eminent type of Christ, as Ahithophel was of Judas, the passage is declared, by our blessed Lord himself, to have been a prediction of the event which was just about to be accomplished in the traitor Judas. Whilst all the Disciples were with their Lord, celebrating the Passover, Jesus declared to them what was about to take place; that one of them, even one of his twelve Apostles, who were with him, would betray him. This declaration filled them all with astonishment

^a Ps. xli. 9. with 2 Sam. xvi. 23.

and grief. They all looked one upon another, to see whether any one would avow such an intention as that: and when no one seemed conscious of any such purpose, all began to suspect themselves, and to ask, “Lord, is it I? Is it I?”

We shall find it not unprofitable to consider,

I. The self-diffidence of the Apostles—

If ever there was an occasion when self-confidence might justly be expressed, methinks it was at that hour, and in reference to that point—

[Methinks the Apostles might well have said, ‘Lord, how can it be that any one of us should so forget his obligations to thee, as to deliver thee up into the hands of thy blood-thirsty enemies, that they may put thee to death? We trust that the principles which we have imbibed from thee are too deeply rooted in our hearts to admit of our ever perpetrating such an act of wickedness, unheard-of wickedness, as that. We acknowledge that we are both weak and sinful; but no consideration under heaven could ever induce us to commit such an abomination as that; and we do hope that, during the years thou hast known us, thou hast seen no reason to suspect us of it.’]

But amongst them all there was no feeling but of self-diffidence and self-distrust—

[No one doubted the truth of our Lord’s assertion, or questioned, for a moment, the certainty of the event. Nor did any one give way to unkind and uncharitable suspicions respecting his brethren. It might have been supposed that each, conscious of his own integrity, would begin to think which of the Apostles was the most likely to act so base a part; and to fix the accusation upon one or upon another, as the prejudices of his own mind might lead him. But nothing of this kind appeared in any one of them. Each began to suspect himself, rather than any other: each said, as it were, within his own bosom, ‘I know more evil of myself than I do of any one else; and therefore I have more reason to be jealous over myself, than over any other person: Lord, am I the unhappy person of whom thou speakest? I am not, indeed, conscious of any such intention: but thou knowest what is in man: thou knowest what evils I may yet commit: tell me, Lord, is it I?’ Thus, with the deepest grief, and the most painful anxiety, every one of them in succession asked, “Is it I? Is it I?”]

At last the traitor Judas himself, fearing lest his very silence should mark him out as the one to whom the guilt

must attach, presumed also to put the question, "Master, is it I^b?" And our Lord told him plainly that it was; and afterwards pointed him out also to the other Apostles, by giving to him a sop in the presence of them all; that so, when the act should have been committed, and all the distressing consequences should have ensued, the other Apostles might remember, that the whole had been foretold by the prophets, and foreseen by our Lord himself^c.]

Let us now attend to,

II. The instruction to be derived from it—

Truly, it must have been a most affecting scene. From it we learn,

1. That there is no evil which fallen man is not capable of committing—

[There are some evils against which our nature utterly revolts; and, if we were supposed capable of committing them, we should be ready to say, with Hazaël, "Is thy servant a dog, that he should do such a thing as this^d?" But so think all, till the fact is proved upon them. Suppose it had been said, "The God of heaven and earth will become incarnate, and in his own person display, as far as human eyes are capable of beholding it, all the glory of his perfections^e." The whole period of his existence upon earth shall be occupied in the exercise of the sublimest virtue, and in acts of the most unbounded beneficence. But he shall be hated, reviled, persecuted even unto death, the accursed death of the cross. But where shall we find men base enough to accomplish it all? Where shall we find rulers impious enough to promote such wickedness, or people base enough to carry it into effect? Where shall we find a favoured Disciple to betray him? Where soldiers impious enough to seize him? Where a judge either unjust or timid enough to condemn him? Where shall we find a man hardy enough to stretch his sacred limbs upon the cross, and nail them to the accursed tree? Where, in short, shall we find agents capable of acting all the different parts in this bloody tragedy? If we were to ask of every individual ruler, and judge, and soldier in the universe, 'Will you be the person to execute such an office against your incarnate God, and more especially after you have had all his glory displayed, as it were, before your eyes in every quarter of the land?' you would think that the prophecy must fail, for want of persons to fulfil it. But it did take place, according to the

^b Matt. xxvi. 25.

^c John xiii. 18, 19, 25, 26.

^d 2 Kings viii. 11—13.

^e John i. 14.

predictions concerning it: and the Apostles shewed a just consciousness of the depravity of our fallen nature, when each, believing that the words of Jesus would be fulfilled, inquired whether he himself were the person destined to fulfil them.]

2. That there is no person so eminent, but he has reason to distrust himself—

[Had our Lord said, that some alien from his family should betray him, it might have been supposed that a person impious enough should be found. But shall such an one be found amongst his own Disciples, who have heard all his public discourses, and been instructed also by him in private, and beheld all his miracles, and been distinguished by him above all others amongst the sons of men? Yes, even amongst them shall this traitor be found. Not all the advantages that ever were enjoyed by mortal man, nor all the grace that was ever given to mortal man, will be sufficient to uphold him, if God, for one moment, withdraw from him his everlasting arms. A more holy man than David cannot be found: yet, after years of most distinguished piety, he fell, as you well know, into sin of the deepest die. Who that had seen Solomon, too, at the dedication of the temple, would have supposed it possible that he should abandon himself to such a course as he pursued during the greater part of his life? And who are *we*, that *we* should think ourselves beyond the reach of temptation and sin? “Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.” To the most devout and holy amongst you all will I say, “Be not high-minded, but fear.” And when the most hateful picture of human deformity is exhibited to your view in the ministry of the word, do not begin to say with yourselves, “I wish that such or such an one were here to behold it!” but rather, with holy jealousy over yourselves, lift up your hearts to God, and say, “Lord, is it I? Lord, is it I?” Then pour out your souls before him; and with fervent supplication cry, “Search me, O Lord, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting^f.”]

3. That the foreknowledge of God does not at all lessen the criminality of our acts—

[The Apostles did not, for a moment, entertain the absurd and impious thought, that the impiety predicted would be less criminal because it was foreseen. The action would be not a whit the less voluntary on this account; and the woe denounced by our Lord against the perpetrator of it was not, in any degree, the less merited or less severe.

^f Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24.

Now, who shall say what Almighty God foresees respecting us? The probability is, that were futurity now to be disclosed to our view, it would be said, 'One in that assembly will betray me, and, for the sake of some present gain, will sacrifice my honour and interests in the world. Another will commit such or such an enormity, and afterwards will terminate his own life with suicide.' Suppose, now, that such a prediction were uttered, shall any one of us presume to say, 'It cannot relate to me: I am not within the reach of such evils as those?' No: rather let every one, with holy fear, suspect himself; and say, 'Lord, is it I? O that it may not be me! Lord, grant that I may never be left so to dishonour God, and so to ruin my own soul!'

But I will suppose that God foresees such an event in any one of you; Are you the less free agents in all that you do? God has foreseen all that you have hitherto done: but did he ever impose upon you a necessity to do it? or will your conscience acquit you of having contracted guilt by means of it? Learn, then, neither to deny God's foreknowledge on the one hand, nor to make it an occasion of questioning your own responsibility, on the other. God knows, at this moment, who will dwell with him for ever in heaven; and who will take up his abode in hell for ever, as much as if our doom had already taken place. But this must not affect our conduct in the least; nor are we at liberty to make his prescience a ground either of presumption or despair. We must look to our ways, and run with holy diligence the race that is set before us: God's final decision will be the result of our conduct, and not of his decrees. He will never save any one purely because he had *decreed* to save him; nor condemn him because he had *decreed* to make him "a vessel of his wrath:" if He award eternal life to any one, it will be because he had sought it in Christ, and "by a patient continuance in well-doing:" and, if any one be made a monument of God's indignation and wrath, it will be altogether on the ground of his evil deeds, and of his having rejected that Gospel whereby alone he could be saved^g. Let us rest assured, that in the last day no one will have reason to complain of the divine decrees; but that, both in those that are saved and those that perish, the wisdom and equity of our God will eternally be glorified.]

^g Rom. ii. 6—10.

MCCCLVIII.

SELF-CONFIDENCE CONDEMNED.

Mark xiv. 31. *He spake the more vehemently, If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in any wise. Likewise also said they all.*

THE influence of example is exceeding powerful, whether it lead to good or evil. This is well known in armies; where courage or timidity beget a kindred feeling speedily, and to a great extent. In moral habits, also, the conduct of one will produce a considerable effect on others. When our blessed Lord apprised his Disciples that one of them would betray him, the diffidence of one diffused itself through all; yea, extended even to the traitor himself, who, if from no better feeling than shame, joined, at last, in that self-diffident inquiry, "Lord, is it I?"^a On the other hand, the dissimulation of Peter drew aside the whole Galatian Church, not excepting even Barnabas himself^b. In like manner, unhappy Peter, by his characteristic self-confidence, betrayed all the other Apostles into the commission of the heinous transgression of protesting an unchangeable fidelity to their Lord, without contemplating the weakness of their own purposes, and the treachery of their own hearts. Our Lord had told them, on the evening before his crucifixion, that they would all be offended because of him that night. Peter, confident in the supposed firmness of his own resolutions, replied, "Although all shall be offended, yet will not I." And, on being more particularly warned that he himself would, that very night, no less than thrice deny his Lord, he, so far from relaxing his confidence, only "spake the more vehemently, If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in any wise." And such was the unhappy effect of his confidence, that every one of the Apostles caught, as it were, the contagion, and expressed themselves in the same vehement language as he: "Likewise, also, thus said they all." Doubtless they all meant well: the resolution itself was good: but it was evil, as being made in dependence on their own strength.

To mark this distinction the more fully, I will shew,
I. The wisdom of the resolution, as conceived in their own minds—

^a Matt. xxvi. 21, 22, 25.

^b Gal. ii. 13.

It was a resolution worthy of the Apostles, and worthy to be adopted by every one of us.

1. Our blessed Saviour *deserves* it at our hands—

[What has He not *done* for *us*? — — — And what has he not *suffered* for us? — — — And should we be afraid to confess him? Should any consideration under heaven induce us to *deny* him? — — —]

2. He also *requires* it at our hands—

[At the very commencement of his ministry he declared, that “those only should be acknowledged as his disciples” who “denied themselves, and took up their cross daily, and followed him;” nay more; that “they only who were willing to lose their life for his sake, should find it unto life eternal^c.” And what can be more reasonable than this? If He, the Lord of heaven and earth, encountered death for *us*, shall we think it too much to lay down our lives for *him*? Methinks, if we offer ourselves a sacrifice for him, it is no other than a reasonable service, which is at once our plainest duty, and our highest privilege — — —]

But the conduct of them all too certainly evinced,

II. The folly of the resolution, as announced in their own strength—

Not one of them was able to fulfil his word—

[That very night “they all forsook their Lord, and fled:” and Peter, who arrogated to himself a greater measure of fidelity than all the others, was the very first to deny his Lord, and denied him with more blasphemous impiety than all the others together.]

And who amongst us would be more firm than they?

[“We have not in ourselves a sufficiency even to think a good thought^d:” how much less, then, can we think to maintain our fidelity towards our Lord, amidst all the terrors of a most cruel death? Through Christ strengthening us, we may undertake any thing^e:” but “of ourselves we can do nothing^f.” In truth, the more self-confident we are, the more “we provoke the Lord to jealousy,” and challenge him to leave us to ourselves^g. Then only can we hope to stand, when we are “strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might^h.”]

LEARN then, Brethren,

1. What your duty is—

^c Matt. x. 38, 39.

^d 2 Cor. iii. 5.

^e Phil. iv. 13.

^f John xv. 5.

^g Jer. xvii. 5—8.

^h Eph. vi. 10.

[Doubtless, this is great and arduous: nor must you, for a moment, wish to lower it. You must see that nothing under heaven should stand in competition with Christⁱ. The state of every man's mind should accord with that of the holy Apostle, when he said, "I am willing, not only to be bound, but to die for the Lord's sake:" and if we are brought to the trial, no sufferings should move us; nor should we account our lives dear unto us, if only we may finish our course with joy, and finish the work which our blessed Lord has assigned us^k.]

2. Where alone our strength lies for the performance of it—

["I know, O Lord," says the prophet, "that the way of man is not in himself; and that it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps^l." And we are told by the wisest of men, that "he who trusts in his own heart is a fool^m." Be convinced of this; and know, that the more ye resemble a little child in your spirit, the more secure ye are. "When ye are weak, then is it that ye are really strong; for then shall God's strength be perfected in your weaknessⁿ."]]

ⁱ Phil. iii. 8.

^k Acts xx. 24. and xxi. 13.

^l Jer. x. 23.

^m Prov. xxviii. 26.

ⁿ 2 Cor. xii. 9, 10.

MCCCCLIX.

PETER'S DENIAL OF HIS LORD.

Mark xiv. 71. *But he began to curse and to swear, saying, I know not this man of whom ye speak.*

THE inspired writers commend themselves and their writings to us, by their faithfulness in recording their own faults— — — If St. Mark wrote his Gospel, as many suppose, under the direction of Peter, we are constrained to admire the humility of Peter more especially: since his fall is narrated more strongly, and his repentance touched upon more slightly, by this, than by any other of the sacred historians. The aggravated circumstances of his conduct, which are mentioned in the text, serve in a very striking manner to shew us,

I. The folly of indulging self-confidence—

[Peter had been warned *generally*, (in common with the other Disciples) that he would forsake, and *particularly*, (in relation to himself,) that he would deny, his Lord. Conceiving

it impossible that he should ever be guilty of such treachery, he protested that he would rather die with his Lord, than save his life by such base means. But, when he came to the trial, he fulfilled our Lord's predictions. He did not even profit by experience; for, when he had betrayed his cowardice in the first instance, he exposed himself to needless temptations by associating himself with the most inveterate enemies of his Lord. Had he gone to the high-priest's palace, to bear testimony to the character of Jesus, we must have commended his courage: but when he had no better object in view than the gratifying of his curiosity, we cannot but condemn his rashness and presumption. The consequence was such as might be expected: his courage failed him in the hour of trial; and he committed the very sins against which he had been warned.

It is almost uniformly thus with ourselves, when we presume to rush into temptation, under the idea that we are strong enough to withstand its influence. Who amongst us has not found, that a needless intimacy with the ungodly has led him into an undue conformity to their habits and principles, and proved, in the issue, injurious to his soul? We have thought perhaps that we could maintain our integrity amongst them with ease and constancy, notwithstanding we have been expressly warned that "a believer can have no fellowship with an unbeliever," and that "the friendship of the world is enmity with God." But the result of all our experiments has uniformly established that divine aphorism, "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool."]

In the conduct of Peter we may further see,

II. The danger of yielding to the fear of man—

[Peter was naturally of a bold intrepid spirit. But he was left on this occasion, that he might know his weakness, and have a convincing evidence that his strength was in God alone. It is common indeed to represent his temptation as light; as though he had been intimidated by the voice of a servant maid. But whoever takes into the account all the circumstances that are related in the different Evangelists, will see, that he had abundant cause for fear; and that, if he had confessed his connexion with Jesus, he would most probably have participated his fate; more especially as it would soon be known, that he was the person who, but an hour or two before, had attempted to kill a servant of the high-priest. But his mind should have been fortified against the danger. He had been told, when first he became a follower of Jesus, that he must "forsake all," and "hate even his own life," in order to be approved as his disciple: and he had very recently professed his readiness to die in his Master's cause: he therefore should have now fulfilled his engagements, and shewn, that he had

both counted the cost, and was willing to pay it. But his courage failed him; and he purchased a temporary peace at the expense of his honour, his conscience, and his soul.

It is justly said, that "the fear of man bringeth a snare." Perhaps it is itself one of the greatest snares that lie in our way to the kingdom of heaven. The profession of Christianity does not indeed expose us now to sufferings as it did in the Apostles' days: but a real love to the Gospel, and conformity to the Saviour's image, is as offensive now to an ungodly world, as it ever was: nor can any one become a sincere and zealous follower of Christ, without incurring much hatred, contempt, and obloquy. Nor is this easy for us to bear. A man who could face an enemy with undaunted courage, would not be able to face the sneers and ridicule of his pretended friends. And hence it is, that many, like Nicodemus of old, are ashamed and afraid to maintain an open connexion with the friends of Christ. Though they know in their hearts that Christ is the only source of spiritual and eternal life; and that they only who follow him in this world will enjoy him in the world to come; they are afraid to avow their principles, and ashamed to associate with the known adherents of Christ. But, if they so deny him in the presence of his enemies, he will surely deny them in the presence of his Father."]

We would, lastly, shew you from the text,

III. The extent to which we may go, when once we begin to fall—

[Peter began with dissembling (mixing with the servants, as if he had been perfectly like-minded with them), and then denied his Lord, and at last confirmed that denial with the most horrid oaths and imprecations: yea, he denied that he even so much as knew the man. Who could ever have thought that Peter should have fallen thus low? But the downward road is very precipitous; and no one knows, when once he yields to sin, whither his evil dispositions will carry him. Sin makes a breach in the soul; and if means be not used at first to obstruct its progress, it will soon inundate the whole man. The example of Peter in the text is a standing memorial to the people of God, and a warning to them to resist the first motions of evil in their bosoms. Judas began with petty thefts; and Demas with secret covetings; and David with wanton looks. If we profit not by their examples, the best that we can hope for will be, to be brought back to God with "broken bones;" and the probability is, that we shall come short of heaven at last, if not have a foretaste of hell in our bosoms, even while we are here. If we would maintain our integrity, we must not only flee from gross sin, but "hate even the garment spotted with the flesh."]

MCCCCLX.

CHRIST'S APPEARANCE TO MARY MAGDALENE.

Mark xvi. 9. *Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils.*

ON few subjects has the ingenuity of critics been exercised more than in reconciling the accounts which the different Evangelists give respecting the appearances of Christ after his resurrection. It is not to be wondered at, that, when such a great variety of occurrences are related in so small a space, some by one person, and others by another, some in a more concise, and others in a more detailed way, there should arise a difficulty in adjusting the precise order in which every fact arose. Cavillers indeed, and infidels have made this a matter of triumph; as if the existence of a difficulty in such a particular as this would invalidate the testimony of the inspired writers altogether. But we do not hesitate to say, that it confirms rather than lessens, the credibility of their testimony; since it proves to a demonstration, that there was no concert between them, but that they related in the simplicity of their minds what they knew to be true, without inquiring whether, in recording a fact, the omission of a trifling circumstance might occasion some obscurity respecting the order or manner of its accomplishment. Leaving those smaller matters, we shall fix our attention on points of the first magnitude and importance: we shall,

I. Notice the manifestations which Jesus gave of himself after his resurrection from the dead—

His first appearance only is mentioned in the text: but it was so speedily followed by others, and their united effect is so important in establishing the truth of his Divine mission, that we may well combine them together, and set them before you in a collective view.

They were,

1. Early—

[It was necessary that our Lord should rise on the third day after his crucifixion. Not only did the period of Jonah's deliverance from the belly of the fish determine the time of Christ's continuance in the grave^a, but it was expressly declared by David, that "God's Holy One should not see corruption^b," and consequently that he should rise from the dead before the fourth day, when bodies in that hot climate, usually began to corrupt^c. Our Lord himself also had said, that, if they should "destroy the temple of his body, he would in three days raise it up again^d:" And so frequently had he foretold that he would rise again on the *third* day, that the prediction was generally known among his enemies, and was indeed the ground of those very precautions which they used to guard the sepulchre, and thereby defeat any conspiracy amongst his followers^e. If then he had not risen on the third day, he would have been proved to be a deceiver: and if he had not made his appearance on that day, he would have given such occasion of triumph to his enemies as could scarcely ever have been removed. The absurd report that was circulated by the soldiers respecting his being stolen away while they were sleeping, would have been sanctioned; and the difficulty of removing that first impression would have been greatly increased. The Disciples too, who were already disconsolate, and, in their own apprehension, deceived, would have abandoned themselves wholly to despair. To prevent these evil consequences, our blessed Saviour manifested himself to Mary "early" on the morning of his resurrection; yea, at least five times on that very day did he make his appearance to different parties of his Disciples; first to Mary, then to the other women, then to Peter, then to two Disciples on their way to Emmaus, and then to the eleven who were gathered together. Thus early were his triumphs proclaimed; and thus seasonably were his Disciples comforted!]

2. Numerous—

[We have already mentioned five appearances on the day of his resurrection. How many he vouchsafed to his Disciples afterwards, we cannot ascertain: for we are sure that they are not all recorded by the Evangelists. St. Paul mentions that Jesus was seen by James, and by five hundred brethren at once; neither of which appearances are particularly specified in the Gospels. We are told however, that "he was seen of the Disciples forty days;" which is a clear intimation that his intercourse with them was both frequent and familiar. Now in this he graciously condescended to our weakness. Had his manifestations of himself been very few, we might have been

^a Matt. xii. 40.

^b Ps. xvi. 10.

^c John xi. 39.

^d John ii. 19—21.

^e Matt. xxvii. 63—66.

ready to fear, that those who testified of his resurrection were either deceivers or deceived. Not even the Apostles themselves credited the appearance of their Master to Mary, or the other females: the very report was considered by them "as an idle tale." Much more therefore may we expect that his avowed enemies would have disbelieved it; and we at this distance of time should have had scarcely any foundation for our faith and hope. But the number of his appearances was such as to preclude a possibility of intentional collusion, or unintentional mistake.]

3. Indubitable—

[However numerous the appearances had been, if they had been all in dreams or visions, or to separate individuals, or at a distance, there would have been reason to doubt the truth and reality of them. But they were of the most satisfactory kind imaginable. Let it be granted, that Mary Magdalene, and the other women, and Peter, and the Disciples going to Emmaus, were deceived; and that the various conversations which they had with him were mere impositions on their eyes and ears; were the eleven deceived, when, notwithstanding the doors were shut, he presented himself in the midst of them, and bade them handle him (to see that he was not a mere spirit, but had flesh and bones, like any other man), and did eat and drink before them? Was the unbelieving Thomas deceived, when our Lord bade him put his fingers into the print of the nails, and thrust his hand into the wound that had been made in his side; and when, in consequence of the impossibility of resisting conviction any longer, he exclaimed, "My Lord, and my God?" Were the five hundred brethren, who saw him at once, deceived; or were they all in a conspiracy to deceive others? Were Peter and the rest deceived, when he told them on which side of the ship to cast their net, and then partook with them of the fish which they had caught? Were they deceived, when, after conversing with him a long time, his Disciples saw him ascend gradually from the midst of them, and taken up into heaven? Blessed be his name! he has taken care that so important a truth, on which all our hopes depend, should not rest on any doubtful testimony, but that it should be substantiated by proofs which cannot be denied without subverting all kinds of evidence, and all human testimony whatsoever.]

Let us now proceed to,

II. Inquire, Why he appeared first to Mary Magdalene in particular?

It is said of Mary Magdalene, that "he had cast

out of her seven devils." And if she was, as she is generally supposed to be, that Mary who anointed the feet of Jesus in the Pharisee's house^f, she had been, not like the common demoniacs, a mere object of pity, but a vile, notorious, abandoned sinner. In this view, the mention of Jesus having cast seven devils out of her, gives singular importance to the text; and most forcible reasons may be assigned, why he appeared to her *first*, in preference to all other persons. He did so,

1. To display the exceeding riches of his grace—

[This was the chief design of God in that plan which he formed for the redemption of mankind^g. The same glorious design also may be seen in a variety of incidents, which, though apparently perhaps of small importance, are deserving of very attentive consideration. The command, for instance, respecting the publishing of the Gospel *first* in Jerusalem, where all ranks of people had so recently united in crucifying the Lord of glory^h, is a most astonishing display of grace and mercy: one would rather have thought that the Apostles should have been ordered to pass them by for ever, than to make them the *first* offers of salvation. The instruments employed to propagate the Gospel, yet further illustrate this point. The person chosen to minister the Gospel to the circumcision, and to convert thousands of them to the faith, was Peter, who had just before denied his Lord with oaths and curses. Yea, to him was such peculiar attention shewn, that he was selected by the angel, as the person to whom, above all others, the knowledge of our Saviour's resurrection was to be instantly conveyedⁱ. And our blessed Lord himself thrice renewed his call to the Apostleship, in the presence of the other Disciples, lest his past denial of his Lord should be construed as a renunciation of it, or a dismissal from it^k. In like manner, the person who was commissioned to go unto the Gentiles, was Saul, the persecutor; who was arrested in his murderous career, and made the most honoured, and most useful, of all the Apostles.

In the same light we view the preference shewn to Mary Magdalene above all others: in manifesting himself first of all to her, our Saviour may well be considered as declaring, that "where sin has abounded, grace shall much more abound^l."]]

2. To reward her pious assiduity—

^f Luke vii. 36—38.

^g Eph. i. 6. and ii. 7.

^h Luke xxiv. 47.

ⁱ ver. 7.

^k John xxi. 15—17.

^l Rom. v. 20.

[Mary having purchased ointments and spices for the purpose of embalming our Lord's body, went early, while it was yet dark, to the sepulchre, to perform that last and mournful office. Though her prospects with respect to his establishing a temporal kingdom were altogether blasted, her regard for him was not in the least diminished. She was anxious to testify her respect in the only way that now remained to her: nor did any considerations of expense, or trouble, or danger, operate for a moment to impede her efforts. Such expressions of undissembled love could not escape the notice of an omniscient and gracious God. Our adorable Emmanuel would have accounted himself "unrighteous, if he could have overlooked such works and labours of love as she now shewed towards his name^m." It had long before been announced by him to the world, "Him that honoureth me, I will honour:" and now he fulfilled that word to this highly-favoured handmaid: nor will he ever suffer even a cup of cold water, given to a person for his sake, to lose its reward.]

3. To give encouragement to all future penitents to the end of time—

[The various events recorded in the Scriptures are not to be limited to the persons to whom they more immediately refer. Many judgments were inflicted, and many mercies vouchsafed, for the benefit of the Church in future ages: and "they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come." We read of pardon being revealed to David the very instant that he confessed his heinous crime: and the improvement which he himself makes of that stupendous mercy, is; "For this shall every one that is godly make his prayer unto thee, in a time when thou mayest be foundⁿ." St. Paul also informs us of the "exceeding abundant grace shewn to him;" and then adds, that he had been thus eminently distinguished by God for this reason; "that God might shew forth in him all long suffering, for a pattern to them that should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting^o." For the same end, it should seem, was Mary Magdalene thus highly favoured. Persons, who are conscious of having committed enormous sins, are apt to think that they can never obtain mercy of the Lord: but our blessed Saviour would have them know, that "though our sins may have been as crimson, they shall be white as snow," and that he is never more willing to feast with us upon the fatted calf, than on our first return from a dissolute and abandoned life.]

CONCLUSION—

^m Heb. vi. 10.

ⁿ Ps. xxxii. 5, 6.

^o 1 Tim. i. 14, 16.

[Behold how effectually every ground of doubt is removed from us! Can we doubt Christ's *power and authority* to save? He has risen from the dead, and thereby given the most convincing evidence that he is ordained of God to be the Saviour of the world: and his numerous appearances to his Disciples after his resurrection preclude all possibility of deception. Can we doubt his *willingness* to save even the chief of sinners? This astonishing exercise of grace to one out of whom he had cast seven devils, forbids us to entertain the thought. Let all then trust in him as both *able* and *willing* to save them to the uttermost.]

MCCCCLXI.

ON THE GOSPEL MESSAGE.

Mark xvi. 15, 16. *He said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature: he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned.*

IT is to be lamented that an unhappy prejudice subsists in the Christian world against the peculiar and most essential doctrines of our holy religion; and that, while ministers defend with zeal and ability the outworks of Christianity, they are at little pains to lead their hearers within the veil, and to unfold to them those blessed truths whereon their salvation depends. Under the idea that moral discourses are more accommodated to the comprehensions of men, and more influential on their practice, they wave all mention of the sublime mysteries of the Gospel, and inculcate little more than a system of heathen ethics^a. They would be ashamed, and almost afraid to make such a passage as this the ground-work of their discourse, lest they should be thought to be contending for some uncertain, unimportant tenets, instead of promoting the interests of piety and virtue. But can any one read such a solemn declaration as that in the text, and account it unworthy of his notice? Can any one consider the circumstances under which it was uttered, or the authoritative manner in which the

^a See this exposed with great perspicuity and strength of argument in Bishop Horsley's First Charge.

Apostles were commanded to publish it to the world, and yet think himself at liberty to disregard it? Shall the very recital of it beget suspicion, as though nothing were desired but to establish the Shibboleth of a party? Let us put away such unbecoming jealousies, and enter in a fair and candid manner into the investigation of the words before us: let us consider that they were among the last words of our blessed Lord while he sojourned upon earth; that they contain his final commission to his Apostles, and, in them, to all succeeding pastors of his Church; that they are distinguished by our Lord himself by that honourable appellation, "The Gospel," or glad tidings; and that they were delivered by him not only as the rule of our faith, but as the rule of his procedure in the day of judgment: let us, I say, consider the words in this view, and, with hearts duly impressed and open to conviction, attend to what shall be spoken, while we endeavour to explain the import—vindicate the reasonableness—and display the excellency—of this divine message: and the Lord grant, that, while we are attending to these things, the "word may come, not in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance."

I. In explaining the import of our text, we shall have little more to do than to ascertain the meaning of the different terms; for the sense of them being once fixed, the import of the whole will be clear and obvious—

Salvation can mean nothing less than the everlasting happiness of the soul. To limit the term to any temporal deliverance would be to destroy utterly the truth as well as the importance of our Lord's declaration: for though it is true, that they, who believed his prophecies relative to the destruction of Jerusalem, escaped to Pella, and were rescued from the misery in which the Jewish nation was involved, yet the followers of our Lord in that and every age have been subjected to incessant persecutions and cruel deaths; nor was that deliverance either of so

great or so general concern, that the Apostles needed to go forth "into all the world," or to preach it to "every creature." Our Lord "came to seek and to save that which was lost;" he came to open a way for the recovery of our fallen race, and to restore men to the happiness which they had forfeited by their iniquities: this is the salvation spoken of in the text, and justly termed, a "salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory."

This salvation is to be obtained by faith; "He that believeth shall be saved." By the term, "believing" we are not to understand a mere assent given to any particular doctrine; for there is not any particular doctrine to which the most abandoned sinner, or even the devils themselves, may not assent: in this sense of the word, St. James says, "the devils believe and tremble." The faith intended in the text is far more than an acknowledgment of the truth of the Gospel; it is an approbation of it as excellent, and an acceptance of it as suitable. Assent is an act of the understanding only: but true faith is a consent of the will also, with the full concurrence of our warmest affections: it is called in one place a "believing with the heart;" and in another, a "believing with all the heart." In few words, faith is a new and living principle, whereby we are enabled to rely upon the Lord Jesus Christ for all the ends and purposes for which he came into the world; a principle, which, at the same time that it takes us off from all self-dependence, leads us to purify our hearts from the love and practice of all sin. To such faith as this our Lord frequently annexes a promise of eternal salvation: in his discourse with Nicodemus he says, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever *believeth in him* should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever *believeth in him* should not perish, but have everlasting life. He that *believeth on him* is not condemned; but he that *believeth not* is condemned already, *because he*

hath not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God." And in the close of that chapter it is added, "He that *believeth on the Son* hath everlasting life; but he that *believeth not the Son*, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." Not that there is any thing meritorious in this grace more than in any other; for, as a grace, it is inferior to love; but salvation is annexed to this rather than to any other, because this alone unites us to the Lord Jesus Christ, in whom we are accepted, and by whose merits we are saved.

To the term Salvation is opposed another of a most awful import, namely Damnation: as the former cannot be limited to any temporal deliverance, so neither can this be limited to any temporal judgment: for, not to mention the express and repeated declarations that the punishment of the wicked will be as "a worm that dieth not, and a fire that is not quenched," our Lord, in the very words before us, contrasts the consequences of unbelief with the consequences of faith; thereby manifesting, that they were to be considered by us as of equal magnitude and duration: and, in his account of the final sentence which he will pass upon the righteous and the wicked in the day of judgment, he describes the happiness of the one and the misery of the other by the very same epithet, in order to cut off all occasion of doubt respecting the continuance of either: "These shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal." We are constrained, therefore to acknowledge, that the threatening in the text includes nothing less than the everlasting misery of the soul, under the wrath and indignation of God.

This, tremendous as it is, will be the fruit of unbelief; "He that believeth not shall be damned." We must not suppose that the unbelief here spoken of characterizes only professed infidels, who openly avow their contempt of Christianity; for then it would by no means afford a sufficient line of distinction between those that shall be saved, and there that shall perish; seeing that there are many who profess

to reverence the Christian revelation, while they live in a constant violation of every duty it enjoins. If the receiving of Christ, as he is offered in the Gospel, be the faith that saves, then the not receiving of Christ in that manner must be the unbelief that condemns. This observation is of great importance: for the generality seem to have no idea that they can be unbelievers, unless they have formally renounced the Christian faith: their consciences are quite clear on this subject: the guilt of unbelief never caused them one moment's uneasiness. But can any thing be more plain, than that the same faith, which is necessary to bring us to salvation, must be also necessary to keep us from condemnation? Indeed it is so self-evident a truth, that the very mention of it appears almost absurd; and yet it will be well if we admit its full force in the point before us: for, however zealous many are to comprehend holy actions and affections in their definitions of saving faith, they are backward enough to acknowledge that a want of those qualities must evidence them to be in a state of unbelief: yet, till this truth be felt and acknowledged, there is little hope that the Gospel will ever profit them at all.

There is a qualifying clause in the text which we must not leave unnoticed; and the rather, because it is added in the former, but omitted in the latter part; "He that believeth, *and is baptized*, shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." Our Lord had appointed baptism as that rite whereby his Disciples should be introduced into the Christian covenant, as the Jews had been by circumcision into the Mosaic covenant: and men's submission to this rite served as a test of their sincerity, and a public badge of their profession. If any were inwardly convinced that the religion of Christ was indeed of divine authority, and were not prevented by insurmountable obstacles from conforming to this rite, they must cheerfully enlist themselves under his banners, and honour him in his appointed way; they must "follow the Lord fully," if they would be partakers of his benefits. But, on the other hand, if they should

submit to this ordinance, and yet be destitute of true faith, their baptism should not save them; they should perish for their unbelief: baptized or unbaptized, they should surely perish.

The parts of the text being thus explained, there remains no difficulty in the meaning of the whole as it stands connected together. No words can be found that can more forcibly express the solemn truth, which our Lord intended to convey: the import of his declaration is so obvious, that we shall not attempt to elucidate it any farther, but will proceed,

II. To vindicate its reasonableness—

That men should be saved for their good works, or condemned for their gross iniquities, would be thought reasonable enough; but that they should be saved by faith, or condemned for unbelief, seems to many to be utterly unreasonable and absurd. But, to a candid inquirer, the equity and reasonableness of both these points may be easily and plainly evinced.

If faith were, as some imagine it to be, a mere assent to certain propositions, it must be confessed, that, to expect salvation by it were preposterous in the extreme. But it has already been shewn that this is not saving faith. The man who truly believes, invariably comes to Christ in *this* way; he confesses with humility and contrition his past offences—he acknowledges, from his inmost soul, that he deserves the everlasting displeasure of God—he renounces every hope that might arise from his comparative goodness, his penitential sorrows, his future purposes, his actual amendment—he embraces Christ as a suitable and all-sufficient Saviour—and relies simply and entirely upon the promises which God has made to us in the Son of his love. This, I say, is the believer's experience at the first moment he truly believes in Christ. To this we might add, that, from that moment, he lives in a state of communion with his Saviour, and exerts himself to the utmost to adorn his profession by a holy life and conversation: but we intentionally omit all the fruits of faith which he

afterwards produces, lest any one should be led to confound faith with its fruits, or to ascribe *that* to faith and works conjointly, which properly belongs to faith alone. Consider then a person coming in this penitent manner to Christ, and trusting in the promises of his God; is it unreasonable that such a person should be saved? Who in all the world should be saved so soon as he, who implores deliverance from his lost estate? Who should reap the benefits of Christ's death, but he, who makes *that* his only plea and dependence? Who may so justly hope to experience God's fidelity, as he who rests upon his promises? Who, in short, should enjoy all the blessings of redemption, but he who seeks redemption in God's appointed way? Surely, if it be reasonable that Christ should "see of the travail of his soul," and that God should fulfil his own word, then is it most reasonable that he who believes in Christ should be saved.

With respect to the condemnation of unbelievers, we readily acknowledge that *that* also would be unreasonable, on a supposition that unbelief were nothing more than a dissent from certain propositions, through a want of sufficient evidence to establish their divine authority. But unbelief is a sin of the deepest dye; and the person who is under its dominion is in a state as offensive to God as can well be conceived. For, in the first place, he rejects that which has been established by every kind of evidence which a revelation from heaven can admit of: and, in rejecting it, he shews that he is lifted up with pride and presumption: for he not only takes upon him to sit in judgment upon God, but denies his own state to be so dangerous and depraved as God has represented it. If he acknowledges himself to be a sinner, he still feels neither his guilt nor his helplessness as he ought, but "goes about to establish a righteousness of his own, instead of submitting to the righteousness of God." That wonderful method which the infinite *wisdom* of God has contrived for the restoration of our fallen race, he accounts "foolishness;" and

substitutes what he esteems a safer and better method of his own. The most stupendous display of divine *love* and *mercy* that ever was or can be exhibited, he disregards: and thus, both “tramples under foot the Son of God, and does despite unto the Spirit of grace:” yea, to use the language of an inspired Apostle, he “makes the only true God a liar;” for whereas God has said, that “there is no other name whereby we can be saved, but the name of Jesus, nor any other foundation than that which he himself has laid,” the unbeliever directly contradicts him, and unequivocally declares his expectation, that there is and shall be some other way of acceptance with him. Now is it unreasonable that such a person should be punished? that such a despiser of God should be left without any part in the believer’s portion? Let us only apply the case to ourselves. If a child should pour contempt upon the wisest counsels of his parents, and question the truth of their most solemn protestations, should we not think him worthy of his parent’s displeasure? would not we ourselves, in such a case, manifest our disapprobation of his conduct? Who then are we, that we should insult GOD thus, and do it with impunity? Who are we, I say, that, when we are at liberty to withhold a blessing from an ungrateful fellow-creature, or to inflict a punishment on him adequate to his offence, *we* should not be in like manner amenable to God? If any say, “We acknowledge the sinfulness of unbelief, but think the punishment of it too severe;” I answer, ‘God himself is the best judge of the malignity of sin; and he has denounced death, eternal death, as the wages due to every sin: much more therefore may it be inflicted for unbelief; since there is no sin so complicated, nor any that so effectually precludes even a possibility of salvation: we may purge away any other sin by a believing application to the blood of Christ; but by unbelief we reject the only remedy provided for us.’

Hoping that the reasonableness of our Saviour’s declaration has been satisfactorily proved, we come,
III. To display its excellency—

While the Gospel of Christ is misrepresented and opposed by man, the angels, who are incomparably less interested in its provisions, are ever contemplating it with admiration and joy. And, if it were better understood amongst us, it could not but meet with a more favourable reception; for it has innumerable excellencies, which render it worthy of universal acceptance. Let us examine a few of its leading features. In the first place, *it clearly defines the way of salvation*. Take any other way of salvation that ever was devised, by repentance for instance, or by sincere obedience; what inexplicable difficulties occur to our view! for, who can tell what degree of repentance will satisfy God for our breaches of his law, and be a sufficient price for heaven? Who can mark out the line which shall be drawn between those that shall be saved and those that shall perish? Who can tell what sincere obedience means? It cannot mean the doing what we *will*, for that would put a murderer on the same footing with an Apostle: and if it mean the doing what we *can*, where is the man that can be saved by it? Where is the man who has not violated it in ten thousand instances, or who does not violate it every day of his life? Who can truly say that for any one day he has mortified every sinful habit as much as he could, exercised every holy affection as much as he could, and practised every species of duty as much as he could? And if we cannot but acknowledge that we might have done more, who shall say what degree of insincerity may be indulged without violating the law of sincere obedience? On all such plans as these we are utterly at a loss; we are at sea without a compass. But take the doctrine laid down in the text, and the way of salvation is so plain, that "he who runs may read it." Let any man ask himself this question, Do I believe in Christ? Let him pursue the inquiry somewhat farther, Do I feel myself a guilty, helpless, condemned sinner? Do I renounce all dependence on my own wisdom, strength, and righteousness? Do I see that there is in Christ a fulness suited to my necessities? And do I daily,

with humility and earnestness, beg of God that "Christ may be made unto me wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption?" These questions are easy enough to be resolved; and by the answer which conscience gives to them, we may know assuredly whether we be in the way to heaven or to hell. And who does not see how great an excellency this is in the Gospel-salvation? Who does not see how strongly this circumstance recommends the doctrine in our text?

Another excellency in the Gospel is, that it is *equally suited to all persons in all conditions*. Had any self-righteous methods of acceptance been proposed to the dying thief, what consolation could he have found? How little could he do in his few remaining hours! However he might have admired the goodness of God to others, he must have utterly despaired of mercy himself. But through faith in Christ he was enabled to depart in peace and joy. As to the murderers of our Lord, how long must it have been before they could have entertained any comfortable hope of acceptance! But the Gospel affords a prospect of salvation to the very chief of sinners, and *that*, even at the eleventh hour. Nor is there any situation whatever, in which the Gospel is not calculated to comfort and support the soul. *Under first convictions* of sin, what so delightful as to hear of a Saviour? *Under subsequent trials and temptations*, how would our difficulties be increased, if we did not know that "God had laid help upon One that was mighty!" The people of God, notwithstanding the hope which they have in Christ, feel great and heavy discouragements on account of the power of indwelling corruption: they seem oftentimes to be rolling a stone up the hill, which rushes impetuously down again, and necessitates them to repeat their ineffectual labours. And what would they do if their dependence were not placed on the obedience and sufferings of the Son of God? Surely they would lie down in despair, and say like those of old, "There is no hope; I have loved strangers, and

after them will I go." *Under the various calamities of life*, also, believers find consolation in the thought that the salvation of their souls is secured by Christ. Hence they are enabled to bear their trials with firmness: they "know how both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need." And shall not this recommend the Gospel? that there is no situation, no circumstance whatever wherein it is not suited to us? that while every other method of salvation increases our anxiety, and, in many instances, drives us utterly to despair, the Gospel always mitigates our sorrows, and often turns them into joy and triumph?

A farther excellency of the Gospel is, that it *refers all the glory to the Lord Jesus Christ*. Every other plan of salvation leaves room for man to boast: but, on the plan of the Gospel, the most moral person upon earth must subscribe to the declaration of the Apostle, "By grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." None, who have obtained an interest in Christ, will take the glory to themselves: the voice of all without exception is, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name be the praise." There is not any thing that distinguishes true believers more than this, that they desire to glorify Christ as the ONE source of all their blessings. In this their hearts are in perfect unison with the glorified saints, who sing continually, "To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood, to Him be glory and dominion, for ever and ever." And is not this another excellency of the Gospel? Is it at all desirable that while some in heaven are ascribing salvation to God and to the Lamb, others should ascribe salvation to God and to themselves? Surely the felicity of heaven is much increased by the obligation which they feel to Jesus, and the consideration that every particle of that bliss was "purchased for them by the blood of God" himself; nor is there so much as one amongst all the hosts of heaven who would consent for an instant to rob the Saviour of his glory.

Lastly—The last excellency which I shall mention as belonging to the Gospel, is, that it *most of all secures the practice of good works*. Here is the chief ground of jealousy with the world: and if the Gospel were indeed liable to the imputations cast on it, if it gave licence to men to continue in sin, we should not hesitate to discard it as a fiction, seeing that it could never be the production of a holy God. But, as the Apostle says, “The grace of God which bringeth salvation teaches us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live righteously, soberly, and godly in this present world.” If we appeal to antiquity, who was ever so strenuous as St. Paul in asserting the doctrine of justification by faith alone? and yet, who was ever so abundant in labours of every kind? or who ever inculcated with greater energy and minuteness the necessity of good works? If we come to modern times, we must observe that they, who now preach justification by faith, are with the very same breath accused of opening heaven to all, however they may act, and yet of shutting the door against all by their unnecessary strictness: and they who receive the Gospel are condemned as licentious, while they are at the same time blamed as too rigid and precise: nor is this by any means a slight proof of the efficacy of the Gospel on the hearts and lives of its professors; for if their *sentiments* expose them to the former censure, it is their *holy conduct* that subjects them to the latter. We grant and acknowledge it with sorrow, that there are some who name the name of Christ without departing from iniquity: but must all therefore be represented as of the same stamp, and the Gospel itself be considered as unfavourable to morality? Is it just, that, while ten thousand glaring sins pass unnoticed in an unbeliever, the misconduct of a few, or perhaps one single fault in “a person professing godliness” should excite a clamour against all the religious world as hypocrites? But, thanks be to God! we can appeal to experience, that faith “does work by love,” and “overcome the world,” and “purify the heart:” we are therefore

emboldened primarily and principally to recommend the Gospel from this consideration, that while the zealous advocates for self-righteousness are miserably defective in all spiritual duties, the Gospel of Christ invariably stimulates us to a holy, spiritual, and unre-served obedience.

Many more excellencies of the Gospel might be mentioned: but if those that have been stated will not endear it to us, it is in vain to hope that any thing which could be added would procure it a favourable reception.

And now, as there are many in this Assembly^a who are already engaged in the service of the sanctuary, and many others who are destined in due time to undertake the sacred office of the ministry, and as the words of my text are in a more especial manner applicable to persons so circumstanced, suffer me, with humility, yet with freedom and faithfulness, to address myself in a more especial manner to them; and let me entreat you to bear with me if I “use great boldness of speech.”

I would beseech you then, my Brethren, to consider, that as the eternal welfare of our fellow-creatures is suspended on their reception or rejection of the Gospel, so their acquaintance with the Gospel must depend, in a great measure, on those who are authorized to teach it: for “faith cometh by hearing; and how shall they hear without a preacher?” Be not offended then if I ask, whether you yourselves have “received the truth in the love of it?” If you have not, how can you properly commend it to others? How can it be expected that you should “contend earnestly for that faith” which you yourselves have never embraced; or that you should labour with becoming zeal to convert your hearers, when you yourselves are unconverted? O let it be a matter of deep and serious inquiry amongst us, whether we have felt the force and influence of the Gospel? Have we ever been convinced of unbelief?

^b Preached before the University.

Have we seen the equity and reasonableness of the judgments denounced against us whilst in that state? Have we, under a deep conviction of our guilt and helplessness, “fled to Christ for refuge?” Have we discovered the transcendent excellency of this salvation; and do we feel in our inmost souls its perfect suitableness to our own necessities, and its tendency to promote the interests of holiness? Can we say with the Apostle, that, “what our eyes have seen, our ears have heard, and our hands have handled of the word of life, that, and that only, we declare” unto our people? In short, while we profess that “the ministry of reconciliation has been committed unto us,” do we experience this reconciliation ourselves? The salvation of our own souls, no less than that of our fellow-sinners, depends on this: indeed we are more interested in the Gospel than any; for if we continue ignorant of it, we perish under the aggravated guilt of rejecting it ourselves, and of betraying the souls of others into irretrievable ruin. We, of all people under heaven, are most bound to divest ourselves of prejudice, and to labour with our whole hearts, both to enjoy the blessings of the Gospel, and to shew ourselves patterns of its sanctifying influence. Let us then, in compliance with the Divine command, “take heed to ourselves, and to our doctrine, that, in so doing, we may both save ourselves and them that hear us.”

But let others also be aware, that though they may have no responsibility attaching to them as ministers, they have as Christians. I must beg leave therefore to say unto *all*, that as “baptism is not the putting away the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience towards God,” so the faith which they profess cannot save them, unless it be accompanied with a renovation of heart and life. Do not then be hasty to conclude that you are true believers: “examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves.” Be assured, it is no easy matter to believe: it is by no means pleasing to flesh and blood: there is not any thing to which we

are naturally more averse : what our Lord said to the Jews of old may be addressed with equal propriety to the greater part of nominal Christians, "Ye will not come unto me, that ye may have life." But let it be remembered, that, however humiliating it may appear to our proud nature to renounce all self-righteousness and self-dependence, and to look for acceptance through the merits of Christ alone, it must be done : it will profit us little to have received the outward seal of his covenant, unless we possess also "the faith of God's elect." Our lofty looks must be humbled, our haughtiness must be brought down, and the Lord alone must be exalted : we must bow before the sceptre of his grace, or we shall be "broken in pieces with a rod of iron." If we truly and cordially "receive Him, we shall have the privilege of becoming the sons of God ; and if sons, then heirs ; heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ." But "what shall our end be, if we obey not the Gospel ?" What prospect have we, but to be "punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power ?" Behold then, life and death are this day set before you. Bearing, as we do, a commission from the Lord Jesus to preach his Gospel, "we are debtors both to the Greeks and to the Barbarians, both to the wise and to the unwise." In his sacred name, therefore, we deliver our message ; we are constrained to deliver it with all faithfulness, "whether ye will hear, or whether ye will forbear." He, who with a penitent and contrite heart believeth in the Son of God, and, by virtue of that faith, is enabled to confess him before men, and to honour him by a holy life, *he* shall "receive the remission of his sins, and an inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith in Christ." But he, who believeth not on the Son of God, however moral *he* may have been in his external conduct, and whatever pleas *he* may urge in extenuation of his guilt, *he*, I say, "shall not see life, but the wrath of God shall abide upon him : " he hath practically said, "I will not have this man to reign over me ;" and the despised

Saviour will, ere long, issue this vindictive sentence—
 “Bring him hither, and slay him before me.” The
 decree is gone forth, nor shall all the powers of hea-
 ven or hell reverse it, “He who believeth and is
 baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not,
 shall be damned.”

MCCCCLXII.

MCCCCLXIII.

MCCCCLXIV.

MCCCCLXV.

See the end of CLAUDE'S ESSAY, where there
 are four different Skeletons *on this same text*,
 to illustrate the four different modes of dis-
 cussion, by Explication—by Observations—
 by Propositions—and by perpetual Applica-
 tion. These, it is hoped, will throw consider-
 able light upon the Composition of a Sermon,
 as an art or Science, and facilitate the attain-
 ment of it.

L U K E.

MCCCCLXVI.

JOHN THE FORERUNNER OF JESUS.

Luke i. 17. *And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.*

THE Mosaic dispensation may be called the age of prophecy; for under it was foretold every thing which should be accomplished to the end of time. The nearer the prophets arrived to the commencement of the Christian era, the more minute and circumstantial were their predictions respecting it. Other prophets had spoken largely of the Messiah; but Malachi, the last of them, points out his harbinger; and closes the prophetic canon with announcing the mission of one, who should prepare the world for his reception^a. Accordingly, about the time that Christ was to come, it was expected that Elijah, or at least some prophet like unto him, should first appear^b. Hence, when the angel was sent to Zacharias to inform him, that he in his old age should have a son, who was destined by God to the office of introducing the Messiah; he cited that very prophecy of Malachi, and cast the true light upon it: he told him, that this son of his should go before the Messiah *in the spirit and power* of Elias, and have the honour of announcing to the world the Messiah's advent.

^a Mal. iv. 5, 6.

^b Hence those questions put to the Baptist, John i. 21. and to our Lord, Matt. xvii. 10—13.

Respecting this person, thus solemnly foretold, and thus miraculously born, we shall be led to notice two things ;

I. His character—

It is in a comparative view that the text requires us to consider this :

He came “ in the spirit and power of Elijah,” whom he closely resembled—

[The resemblance may be seen in *the endowments of their mind*^c — — — *the habits of their life*^d — — — *the exercise of their ministry*^e — — —]

In this view, John is said to be “ great in the sight of the Lord” —

[Such a character will not be admired amongst men : but with God it is in the highest estimation. We grant that, in some respects, it is not so much suited to us, as it was to John, and the particular office he sustained : but, for the most part, it is proper for every person in every age, and most of all for ministers. It is proper that we be “ filled with the Holy Ghost ;” and if we be so “ even from our mother’s womb,” happy are we. We ought also to shew a holy superiority to the world, to sit loose to its cares and pleasures, and to be regardless of its frowns or favours. We should dare to serve our God, even though the whole nation have departed from him : and bear our testimony against sin, by whomsoever it be committed. We should shew ourselves determinately on the Lord’s side, and “ shine as lights in a dark world.”]

Suited to his august character was,

II. His office—

This was peculiar to himself ; he alone of all the sons of men was appointed to be *the forerunner* of his Lord—

[It was customary for great personages to send messengers before them to prepare their way : and such a messenger

^c They were both men of eminent piety. Compare 1 Kings xvii. 24. and Jam. v. 17. and 2 Kings ii. 9, 11. with Luke i. 15. John v. 35. Matt. xi. 9, 11.

^d They were self-denied and dead to the world. Compare 1 Kings xvii. 3—6, 10. and 2 Kings i. 8. with Matt. iii. 4. and Luke i. 80.

^e They were bold reprovers and successful reformers. Compare 1 Kings xviii. 17—40. and xxi. 19—24. and 2 Kings i. 3, 4. with Luke iii. 7—9, 10—14, 16—18, 19. and Matt. xxi. 32.

was John the Baptist^f. It was highly proper that so glorious a person as the Messiah should not even appear to come in a surreptitious or clandestine manner; but that the minds of men should be directed to him, and his arrival be made the subject of general expectation. Hence we find, that the great argument by which John excited men to repentance, was this, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." He continually disclaimed all pretensions to the Messiahship himself, and directed them to One, who was speedily to arise among them, "whose shoe-latchet he was not worthy to unloose." As the Messiah's harbinger, he strove to prepare the hearts of men for his reception. Men of all ages and descriptions were warned by him; and "fathers *with* their children were turned by him unto the Lord their God." The most "disobedient" among them "were converted by him to the wisdom of the just," even to that adorable Jesus, whom all the righteous love, and in the love of whom true wisdom consists. This was the end and aim of his whole ministry, even to point men to that "Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world:" and, having succeeded in this according to his father's prediction^g, he was glad himself to "decrease," that "the Messiah might increase" and be glorified^h.]

But similar to his, is the office of every minister—

[The minds of the generality are as regardless of Christ as if he had never come into the world; they take his name indeed into their lips, but have no desire after his salvation in their hearts. Hence arises the necessity of crying to them continually, "Behold the Lamb of God," "behold him, behold him!" Him we must exalt as the only Saviour of the world; and account our lives well spent, if we be the favoured instruments of converting but a few to him — — —]

We cannot but OBSERVE from this subject,

I. How great a person Christ must be—

[From the preparations which were made for his reception, *we* are led to expect that he was possessed of more than human dignity: and accordingly we find him identified with Jehovah^k, and designated as the "Lord our God^l." Yes: he was "Emmanuel, God with us," or, as he is elsewhere called, "the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ^m." While therefore *we* contemplate his advent, let us think of it with the profoundest admiration, and the most lively gratitude.]

^f Mal. iii. 1. with Matt. xi. 10, 14.

^g ver. 76, 77.

^h John iii. 30.

ⁱ Isai. lxxv. 1.

^k Compare Mal. iii. 1. with Matt. xi. 10.

^l ver. 16.

^m Tit. ii. 13.

2. How important must be the knowledge of him—

[The very end for which John was miraculously given to the world, was to bear witness to Christ, and to commend him to the Jewish nation. Was then the knowledge of Christ of such importance to the Jews? Surely it is no less so to us: our salvation depends upon it, as well as theirs: and therefore we should all ask ourselves, 'What think I of Christ? What am I the better for him? What hope have I in him?' In him alone can we find acceptance, and "by him alone can we be justified." To him then let us direct our most assiduous attention, and "count all things but as dross and dung" for the excellency of the knowledge of him."]

MCCCCLXVII.

THE ANGEL'S MESSAGE TO MARY.

Luke i. 35, 38. *And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God . . . And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it unto me according to thy word.*

AS none can tell what devices Satan is plotting for their ruin, or what snares he may bring them into; so none can tell what thoughts of peace and love God may have towards them, or what mercies he may speedily vouchsafe unto them. Little did the persecuting Saul think, when on his journey to Damascus, what God would do for him before he reached the place of his destination: and as little did the blessed Virgin imagine, when engaged in her domestic duties, what was in reserve for her, or what a single day should bring forth. The time fixed in the Divine counsels came at last, when the Messiah was to be brought into the world; and the Virgin Mother was to be informed of God's designs respecting her. Methinks, at the first address of the angelic messenger, she was filled with surprise and terror: but having been fully instructed respecting that peculiar favour which God had prepared for her, she acquiesced in the Divine proposals, and committed herself with all her concerns, into the hands of her Almighty Friend.

We propose to consider,

I. The honour promised her—

She was informed, that God had ordained her to be the happy instrument of bringing into the world his only dear Son : and, on her inquiring how that should be accomplished in her virgin state, she was told that the Holy Ghost, who at the first creation of the world “ moved upon the face of the waters,” and reduced the chaotic mass to order and beauty, should, by his almighty power, form in her that Holy Being, who should, in his human as well as his divine nature, be the Son of God.

But here a question arises, why should the Messiah be born in this way ? Why might not the privilege of bearing him be vouchsafed to her in a way more agreeable to the common course of nature ? We answer, that there was, if we may so speak, a necessity for it :

1. That he might not be involved in Adam’s guilt—

[Adam was not a mere individual, but the head and representative of all his posterity ; and, when he violated the covenant which God had made with him, he brought a curse, not on himself only, but on all his descendants also. This is evident from the death of infants, who cannot have contracted personal guilt, and yet suffer the punishment of sin. This could not be, if sin, in some shape or other, were not imputed to them. It is by “ the transgression of Adam that they are accounted sinners, and that judgment comes upon them to condemnation ^a.” “ In Adam all died ^b.”

Now if the Lord Jesus had descended from him in the common way, he would have lain under the same sentence of condemnation with others, and therefore would have needed a deliverer himself, instead of becoming a deliverer to others.]

2. That he might not partake of Adam’s corruption—

[When Adam fell, he became corrupt in every member of his body, and in every faculty of his soul. And we are particularly informed, that “ he begat a son in *his own* likeness,” not in the likeness of God in which he was created, but in his own image as a fallen creature. An awful evidence of this truth he soon beheld, in Cain’s hatred, and murder, of righteous Abel.

^a Rom. v. 12—19.

^b 1 Cor. xv. 22.

Of this corruption Christ must have participated, if he had been born in the way of other men: for "who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one^c," says Job: and again, "How can he be clean that is born of a woman^d?" In this case, he could not have been "a Lamb without spot or blemish;" and consequently not a proper sacrifice for sin. He must be without sin himself, if he is to take away the sins of others^e; and "offer himself without spot to God," if he is to purge away the guilt of a ruined world^f.]

3. That the Scriptures might be fulfilled in him—

[The very first promise which announced his future birth, designated him as exclusively "the Seed of the woman^g." We might not perhaps have so limited the import of that passage, if subsequent prophecies had not thrown the true light upon it: but Isaiah expressly says, that "a virgin shall conceive, and bring forth a Son, and shall call his name Emmanuel^h; and an inspired Apostle assures us, that this Scripture had an exact and literal accomplishment in the birth of Jesusⁱ. The Prophet Jeremiah also, encouraging the Jews to return to their native land, tells them, that "God would create a new thing there, namely, A woman should compass a man^k;" that is, should bear a man-child in her virgin state, which had never taken place from the foundation of the world, and which would in a peculiar manner require the exercise of his all-creating power.

Now the Scriptures cannot be broken: if therefore Jesus was to be the Messiah spoken of in the prophets, he must be born in this very manner; and the honour of bearing him must be enjoyed in this way alone.]

From the conferring the honour, we are naturally led to consider,

II. Her acceptance of it—

Here, while we behold her virgin modesty, unalloyed with any mixture of pride or boasting, we are of necessity called to admire,

1. Her faith in the promise—

[When Zacharias, an aged and pious priest, had been informed by the angel that he should have a son in his old age, he doubted the truth of it, and required a sign for the confirmation of his faith¹: but when this holy Virgin was told of a thing far less credible, she doubted not one single moment: her question was, not for the assuring of her mind about the

^c Job xiv. 4.

^d Job xxv. 4.

^e 1 John iii. 5.

^f Heb. ix. 14.

^g Gen. iii. 15.

^h Isai. vii. 14.

ⁱ Matt. i. 22, 23.

^k Jer. xxxi. 22.

^l ver. 18—20.

truth of the promise, but merely for information respecting the mode of its accomplishment. Now in this she shewed the eminence of her piety: and for this she was particularly commended by God himself, who inspired Elizabeth, at the first appearance of the Virgin, to exclaim, “Blessed is she that believed; for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord^m.” It was such an exercise of faith that made Abraham so distinguished among all the sons of men, and so eminently beloved of his Godⁿ. This also was the grace which most particularly characterized all the saints of old^o; which also our blessed Lord invariably honoured with his peculiar approbation; which therefore should exalt his Virgin mother exceeding highly in our esteem.]

2. Her submission to the appointment—

[She could not but know that the honour proposed for her acceptance might entirely ruin her character, and possibly even affect her life: for God himself had commanded, that a virgin betrothed should, if unfaithful to her engagements, be punished with death, exactly as she would have been if actually married^p. On these grounds she might well have suggested doubts, and inquired, how she should be protected from these awful consequences. But she felt no doubt, but that He, whose power and love could confer upon her the proposed honour, would exercise a watchful care over her, and either entirely prevent, or richly recompense, these dreaded evils. Like “Abraham, who at the call of God went out, not knowing whither he went,” she cheerfully committed herself to the Divine protection, knowing in whom she had believed, and assured that he would never leave her nor forsake her. That there was just ground for such fears, appears by the very purpose which Joseph formed, of putting her away as an adulteress: and which was only prevented by the intervention of God himself, who sent an angel to inform him by what means she was pregnant, and to commend her to his peculiar care.]

Here again we cannot but admire that resignation and fortitude, whereby she rose superior to all those fears and apprehensions, which such a situation was calculated to inspire.]

3. Her gratitude for the favour—

[At the first, as we might expect, her frame was that of meek and humble submission. But, when she had had time to reflect upon the greatness of the mercy vouchsafed unto her, and the blessings which would come upon the world by her means, she broke forth into the most exalted strains of praise: “My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced

^m ver. 45.

^o Heb. xi.

ⁿ Rom. iv. 3, 13, 18—22.

^p Dent. xxii. 23, 24.

in God my Saviour." She justly acknowledged, that, "He who was mighty had done to her great things," in the contemplation of which "all generations would call her blessed." She viewed with ineffable delight the accomplishment of that promise which had been made to Abraham; and doubtless, to the latest moment of her life, adored that God, who had made use of her as his honoured instrument to fulfil it.]

In the review of this mysterious subject, we may

LEARN,

1. How God fulfils his promises—

[The difficulty here seemed insurmountable: the Son of God, in order "to redeem them that were under the law, must be made under the law," yet not really obnoxious to its curse; and be "made of a woman," subject to all the infirmities of our nature, and yet be free from sin^q. But God is never at a loss: "with him nothing is impossible:" he devised and executed a plan, whereby we might have "such an high-priest as became us, holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners^r;" a plan, that filled all heaven with wonder. Thus, in other dispensations of his providence and grace, he often permits difficulties to arise, which preclude all hope of our attaining the object of our desire. But, in the best and fittest season, he interposes, and "makes light to arise in obscurity, and our darkness to be as the noon-day." At this hour, as much as in the days of Abraham, is that saying true, "In the mount the Lord shall be seen."]

2. How we ought to receive them—

[Amongst the many promises which God has given us, there is one "exceeding great and precious," not unlike to that which has been the subject of our present consideration; namely, that "Christ shall be formed in our hearts^s; that being so formed, he "shall dwell in us^t;" and that so dwelling in us, he shall be to us "the hope of glory^u." This promise is even greater than that which was fulfilled to the blessed Virgin, inasmuch as a spiritual union with the Lord exceeds that which is merely carnal^x. And how should we receive this promise? I answer, precisely as the blessed Virgin did. We should not stagger at it through unbelief: we should not account it too *good* for his love to grant, or too *great* for his power to execute. We should be alike unmoved by either the difficulties that may obstruct its accomplishment, or the dangers that may follow it. Our reputation, our interests, our life,

^q Gal. iv. 4, 5. Heb. ii. 17. and iv. 15.

^r Heb. vii. 26.

^s Gal. iv. 19, ^t Eph. iii. 17.

^u Col. i. 27.

^x Luke xi. 27, 28.

we should commit to the hands of a faithful Creator, equally ready to suffer for him, or to be more illustrious monuments of his paternal care. O happy should we be, if in this manner we could embrace every promise he has given us, and in full expectation of its accomplishment say, "Behold the servant of the Lord, be it unto me according to thy word."]

MCCCCLXVIII.

THE VIRGIN'S SONG OF PRAISE.

Luke i. 46, 47. *And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.*

THE characteristic features of the unregenerate man are pride and selfishness. If the distinctions of others are superior to his own, he regards them with envy; if inferior, with contempt. The reverse of this is universally produced by the grace of God. That teaches us to "seek not our own things only, but also the things of others;" and to "prefer others in honour before ourselves:" being ready at all times to acknowledge and commend what is good in them, and to give God the glory of whatever good there may be in us. No where will this be found more beautifully exemplified than in the interview which took place between Elizabeth and the Virgin Mary. Immediately after the blessed Virgin had been informed of God's gracious design respecting her, she went to visit her cousin Elizabeth, who had, by the immediate influence of Heaven, been enabled to conceive a son in her old age. On her very first appearance, Elizabeth, neither elated with her own honour, nor envious of Mary's, broke forth into the warmest congratulations; losing all sight, as it were, of her own mercies, and rejoicing altogether in those which had been vouchsafed to her pious friend. The Virgin too, in her reply, shewed clearly on what her mind was fixed, and what was the main desire of her heart. Not a single word savouring of self-exaltation escaped her lips: but with devoutest gratitude she ascribed unto God the honour due unto his name.

In considering these first effusions of her soul, it will be proper to notice,

I. The grounds of her joy—

[Doubtless she had some respect to the peculiar mercy vouchsafed to her^a: nor could she without base ingratitude have overlooked it. But it is evident that her views were directed to “God” himself, as the Benefactor, the “Saviour,” of mankind.

If we consider God *the Father* as the object in whom she rejoiced, still it was in him *as sending his Son into the world*, and by him reconciling the world unto himself. It was in him also as *her Saviour*. Here then we see her sentiments in relation to the state of her soul before God. Holy as she was, she saw herself a sinner before God, and justly obnoxious to his everlasting displeasure. She was convinced also that she could not by any means make atonement for her sins, or reconcile herself to God. She felt that she needed a Saviour as much as the vilest of the human race: and she looked for salvation solely as the gift of God through the merits of her Redeemer.

Were such *her* views? what ought to be *ours*? what should be our estimate of *our own* state? How vain must be that conceit, which the more chaste and sober amongst us are prone to indulge, that they do not deserve the wrath of God; or that they shall find acceptance with God because of their *comparative* goodness!

If we consider *the Lord Jesus Christ* as the object of her joy, (which we may well do,) then do we see what her views were of that child, whom she was in due time to bring into the world. “David, in and by the Spirit, had called him Lord,” at the time that he spoke of him as his son, who should in due time arise to sit upon his throne^b. And Elizabeth had directly acknowledged that holy Being that was but just formed in the Virgin’s womb, as “her *Lord*,” and had declared that the infant in her own womb had leaped for joy at his approach^c. The Virgin herself too knew his Divine origin, and that he was “the Son of the Highest.” Well therefore might she “magnify” him for his astonishing condescension, and “rejoice in” him as her deliverer from the wrath to come. It is probable enough that her views of his work and offices were much less distinct than ours: but, whether more or less clear, they were manifestly the ground of her joy. She knew that he was sent to be the Saviour of the world; and she had no doubt but that he would “finish the work which God had given him to do.”

And have not we the same ground of joy^d? or rather, ought

^a ver. 48, 49.

^b Compare Ps. cx. 1. with Matt. xxii. 43—45.

^c ver. 43, 44.

^d Luke ii. 10, 11.

not our joy in him to be more sublime, in proportion as our knowledge of him is more clear? O let not our views of him be less exalted, or our affiance in him less firm! — — —]

From viewing the grounds of her joy, let us turn our attention to,

II. The expressions of it—

[Here we behold a blessed mixture of *admiration*, *gratitude*, and *joy*. It is evident that her mind was full of her subject: the abruptness of her speech shews, that she had “mused in her heart till the fire kindled; and then she spoke with her tongue.” She was naturally of a ruminating thoughtful turn^e: and, from the moment when the angel announced to her the Divine purpose, we doubt not but that her meditations had been on this subject night and day. Here then, overwhelmed, as it were, with the greatness of this mystery, she gives vent to her feelings, and magnifies him as her Saviour, whom by faith alone she knew to have been formed in her womb.

Fain would she have presented to her God a tribute of praise adequate to the occasion. Her soul and spirit “were engaged to the uttermost:” but the language of mortality was too feeble for such a theme. Yet, as far as she could, she “magnified” her Lord, and rendered to him the acknowledgments so justly due.

As to the joy she felt, that also, no less than her theme, exceeded the powers of language to express. Even if she could have expressed it, her words would not convey to us any precise ideas, unless we had correspondent feelings within our own bosom.

If such, then, was her state, we ask, what can any man know of this mystery, who has not been filled with wonder at it? What can any man know of it, who does not rejoice in it with most exalted joy, and bless God for it from his inmost soul? — — — As a speculative truth, indeed, it may have received our assent, even though we have never contemplated it with any suitable emotions: but if the excellency of the truth have been ever felt, we have found that we sunk under it as ineffable, incomprehensible; and were constrained to adore in silence the mercies which we could not utter — — —]

From this instructive history we may LEARN,

1. Our duty—

[Persons readily acknowledge their obligation to do as they would be done unto, or even to perform some religious duties: but they can live all their days without rejoicing in God, and yet never feel any sense of guilt on account of it.

^e Luke i. 29. and ii. 19, 51.

But are not the commands on this head as clear, and as forcible, as on any subject whatever? "Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice^f;" "Rejoice evermore, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you^g." Indeed the exercise of this heavenly disposition is represented as characteristic of the true Christian, insomuch that no person can claim that honourable appellation, who is a stranger to it: "We are the circumcision, who rejoice in Christ Jesus^h." Let not any then imagine that they are in a state acceptable to God, while they continue to have such low thoughts of the Saviour, and are so insensible to all the wonders of redeeming love — — —]

2. Our privilege—

[We are almost ashamed to have spoken of joy in Christ under the name of *duty*. What would a glorified saint feel, if exhorted to it as a *duty*? He would spurn at the idea: he would say, 'It is not my *duty*, but my *privilege*: it constitutes the very happiness of heaven.' O that we could learn to think of it in that view! It is in this very light that St. Peter speaks of it, not as an object to be desired, but as an attainment common to the saints: "Believing in Christ," says he, "ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and *glorified*ⁱ." Look at the Psalmist, and behold his state: he determined to praise his God with every faculty of his soul^k, and every member of his body^l, if we may so speak; and to spend every day, (I had almost said, every hour,) to the end of life, in this blessed employment^m. Let us imitate his example. "Let *them* give thanks, whom the Lord hath redeemed:"ⁿ if *we* do not, "the very stones will cry out against us." We are not advocates for enthusiasm: but if to resemble the holy Virgin, to be filled with admiring thoughts of the Saviour, and to anticipate the felicity of heaven, be enthusiasm, let us be enthusiasts: such enthusiasts will God approve. Yet, that we give no just occasion for that reproach, let us combine discretion with devotion; according to the exhortation of the Psalmist, "Sing praises to the Lord, sing praises; sing praises to the Lord, sing praises; sing ye praises *with understanding*ⁿ."]]

^f Phil. iv. 4. ^g 1 Thess. v. 16, 18. ^h Phil. iii. 3.

ⁱ 1 Pet. i. 8. ^k Ps. ciii. 1, 2.

^l Ps. xxxv. 9, 10. "My soul — — — yea, *all my bones* shall say, &c."

^m Ps. cxlv. 1, 2. and cxlvi. 1, 2. and cxix. 164. and cxix. 62.

ⁿ Ps. xlvii. 6, 7.

MCCCCLXIX.

THE SONG OF ZACHARIAS.

Luke i. 67—75. *And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he hath visited and redeemed his people, and hath raised up an horn of salvation for us, in the house of his servant David; as he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets which have been since the world began; that we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us: to perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; the oath which he swore to our father Abraham, that he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life.*

CONSIDERING the depth of humiliation to which the Son of God was about to submit, in taking upon him our nature, it was necessary that his birth should be attended with such circumstances, as were calculated to impress the minds of men with a conviction of his real character. Accordingly we find, that, previous to his birth, there was ample testimony given to him as a most extraordinary personage, such as the world had never before seen. A person was sent “to prepare his way before him:” and this forerunner was himself distinguished by a preternatural birth. The father of this messenger was informed by an angel, that his aged, and hitherto barren, wife should conceive a son, who should be called John. On his expressing some doubt of the angel’s veracity, he was struck dumb for his unbelief; and continued so till the birth and naming of the promised child: and then, on his confirming the appointment of his wife respecting the name of the child, his tongue was loosed, and he brake forth into this prophetic hymn of praise: in which he blesses God for the advent of the Messiah,

I. As an accomplishment of prophecy—

The incarnation of the Son of God had been foretold from the beginning of the world—

[It was announced to Adam immediately after his fall^a. To Abraham it had been promised with an oath^b. To David, from whose loins the Messiah was to spring, it had been confirmed by an everlasting covenant^c.

In a more particular manner it had been foretold that Christ should “*visit and redeem*” his people. The state of the Israelites in Egypt, and their redemption from thence, had been foreordained from the beginning, in order to typify this great event. Abraham was warned of the afflictions which his posterity should endure there, and of the wonderful deliverance which at a remote period they should experience^d. Joseph in his dying hour assured his brethren, that God would “*visit them,*” and bring them thence^e. And Moses was in due time sent upon this errand, and commissioned to inform his wretched countrymen, that God was come at last to *visit* and deliver them^f. Now in the text, there is, as in the sequel will more fully appear, a reference, not to the event merely, but to the very terms in which that event was predicted: from which circumstance, the typical application of that history to the incarnation of Christ, is clearly warranted and confirmed.]

For the accomplishment of this great event, this holy man blessed and adored his God—

[The prospect of this event had excited a lively joy in the breast of Abraham, at the distance of two thousand years^g: and all who, in the intermediate space, had successively believed the promises, had lived and died in the pleasing expectation, that the happiness denied to them should be granted to their posterity^h. When the time for the Messiah’s advent drew nigh, the expectation of him became more generalⁱ, more joyful, more assured. Many there were who “looked for redemption in Jerusalem^k,” and “waited for Jesus as the Consolation of Israel^l.” What wonder then that, on the sight of his forerunner, Zacharias burst forth in these triumphant strains? What wonder that, in the confidence of faith, he spake of the Saviour as already arrived, yea, and the work of redemption as already effected by him, though there were yet several months to elapse before he would be born into the world? It was surely the fittest use of his newly-recovered speech; and had he forborne to use it thus, “the very stones would have cried out against him.”]

^a Gen. iii. 15.

^b Gen. xxii. 16—18.

^c Ps. lxxxix. 3, 4, 34—36. and cxxxii. 11, 17, 18.

^d Gen. xv. 13, 14. with Acts vii. 6, 7.

^e Gen. l. 24, 25.

^f Exod. iii. 16, 17.

^g John viii. 56.

^h Heb. xi. 13.

ⁱ John iv. 25.

^k Luke ii. 38.

^l Luke ii. 25.

But the incarnation of Christ was a ground of joy to him :

II. As a mean of spiritual blessings—

Here the reference to the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt is yet more manifest than before. The requisition made by Moses to Pharaoh was, that Israel should go into the wilderness to serve the Lord. This was the ground of contest between them^m; till at last God, by his terrible judgments on the Egyptians, decided the point. But, after that the Israelites were brought forth to the very borders of the Red Sea, they were menaced with utter destruction by Pharaoh and all his host. The overwhelming of that army in the sea completed the deliverance of his people, so that they could from that moment serve the Lord without any fear of their ancient oppressors.

The redemption wrought out by Christ is in perfect correspondence with this. By his advent we obtain,

1. Deliverance from our spiritual enemies—

[We are in the hand of enemies more cruel and tyrannical than those of Egypt; we are in bondage to sin and Satan, death and hell. From these our blessed Lord delivers usⁿ. By the blood of his cross he expiates sin, overcomes Satan, destroys death, and liberates from the jaws of hell. He is “an horn of salvation” to his people, a mighty and irresistible Saviour, who will push down all his enemies. None can detain us any longer in bondage, when he comes to set us free: “if he make us free, then are we free indeed^o.”]

2. Liberty to serve our God—

[Deliverance from the punishment of sin would be unworthy the name of a deliverance, if it were not accompanied with a restoration to the Divine favour, and a thorough renovation of heart and life. As long as we were destitute of holiness, we must of necessity be strangers to happiness. Heaven itself would be no heaven to an unholy soul. But Jesus “redeems us from all iniquity, and purifies us unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works^p.” He causes us to delight ourselves in God; and to “serve him without fear.” In this respect we far exceed all who lived under the Jewish dispensation: for *they* were kept at a distance from God; and

^m Exod. v. 1—3.

ⁿ This is twice mentioned in the text.

^o John viii. 36.

^p Tit. ii. 14.

the very services which they rendered to him, tended to generate in them a servile fear^q? But *we* “have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father!”

Can it be doubted whether these things deserve our grateful acknowledgments? If the state to which the Israelites were brought in the Wilderness or in Canaan, was a just ground of praise and thanksgiving, is not ours much rather?

APPLICATION—

1. Let us bless God for the event we this day commemorate^s—

[The Saviour's birth was proclaimed by angels as “glad tidings of great joy to all people;” and the heavenly hosts themselves began a new song in heaven, “Glory to God in the highest!” The virgin who bare him, the patriarch who took him in his arms, the prophetess who beheld him, together with many others, rejoiced exceedingly in his advent, notwithstanding they had such imperfect views of his character. Shall not *we* then; we who have had his nature and office so fully revealed to us; we who have seen him dying, rising, ascending, and enthroned; we who have beheld him sending down the Holy Ghost from heaven, and saving myriads of sinners like ourselves; yea, we who have experienced his power to save, (if we have indeed experienced it,) shall not *we* praise him? Yes; blessed, “blessed be his name for visiting and redeeming” our souls! “blessed be his glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with his glory! Amen, and Amen^t.”]

2. Let us seek to participate the blessings accruing from it—

[Though we are not properly affected with our spiritual bondage, because we are in love with our chains, yet is it far more terrible than any to which our bodies can be subject. Now we are well assured, that if heavy tasks were daily imposed on us, and we were constantly beaten for not executing what it was not in our power to perform, we should not unfrequently pour out our complaints before God, and cry to him to avenge our cause^u. What stupor then has seized us, that, in a situation incomparably more lamentable, we do not embrace deliverance when it is offered? Let us not be satisfied with captivity, when Christ is “proclaiming liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound^x.”

^q Heb. xii. 18—21. ^r Heb. xii. 22—24. with Rom. viii. 15.

^s This Sermon was preached on Christmas-day.

^t Ps. lxxii. 18, 19. ^u Exod. v. 14—16. ^x Isai. lxi. 1

Let us not “ thrust him away from us^y,” when he is come to visit us: but let us welcome him into our hearts, as well as into the world, and never rest till “ we know him in the power of his resurrection, in the fellowship of his sufferings, and in a conformity to him” both in holiness and in glory^z.]

^y Acts vii. 27, 39.

^z Phil. iii. 10.

MCCCCLXX.

THE CAUSES OF OUR SAVIOUR'S INCARNATION.

Luke i. 78, 79. *Through the tender mercy of our God, the day-spring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.*

OUR Saviour's birth, though in many respects peculiarly low and abject, was attended with some circumstances not unworthy the occasion. We might mention his miraculous conception, the acclamations of angels, &c. &c.; but we shall only advert to the account given in the context of his Forerunner, who was prophesied of by Isaiah; named by the angel before his conception in the womb; born in a preternatural way; celebrated by several to whom the spirit of prophecy was given after it had been withdrawn from Israel three hundred years, commissioned to prepare men for the reception of the Saviour, and to publish the tidings in the text—

From them we shall be led to contemplate,

I. The advent of our Lord—

Our Lord is here represented under the image of the Sun—

[This is a metaphor by which he has been designated throughout all the Holy Scriptures. Balaam spoke of him as “ a Star that should come out of Jacob^a :” Isaiah, as “ a great light which the Gentiles who were walking in darkness should behold^b :” Malachi, as “ the Sun of Righteousness that should arise on the world with healing in his wings^c.” In the New Testament also he is declared to be “ the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world^d.” Our Lord

^a Numb. xxiv. 17.

^b Isai. ix. 2. with Matt. iv. 16.

^c Mal. iv. 2.

^d John i. 9.

himself also assumes that character; "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life^e." Even in heaven itself does he sustain the same character; for "the Lamb is the light thereof^f."

Moreover, what the sun is to the material world, that is he to us. He is the Author of all light, natural^g, intellectual^h, spiritualⁱ: and, as the face of nature withers or revives, according as the influence of the sun upon it is increased or diminished, so the souls of men continue dead or are quickened, according as the Sun of Righteousness withhold or imparts his invigorating rays — — —]

Under that character he has visited our benighted world—

[A dawning of his appearance had been long visible in the promises of God, and in all the prophetic writings, as also in the whole of the Mosaic ritual. But at his incarnation he began more clearly to illumine this horizon. He diffused a light around him by his doctrine and example: and they who could see through the veil of his flesh, "beheld his glory^k." And those who now will receive his truth, and "follow his steps," shall surely be as much distinguished from the world around them, as they who are groping in midnight darkness are from those who are walking in the light of the noon-day sun — — —]

This will lead me to speak of,

II. The end of his advent—

The whole world were in utter darkness—

[How little did even the wisest philosophers know respecting any thing pertaining to the eternal world! Truly "the world by wisdom knew not God^l." Nor are we in reality more enlightened in reference to spiritual things than they. I grant that, so far as *speculative* knowledge is concerned, we have the advantage of them: but in respect to *saving* knowledge, we are as dark as they. Take *the sentiments* even of the world at large, and compare them with the word of God; and they will be found as far from the truth as if they had no inspired volume to instruct them. And where their mere sentiments are correct, how faint are *their apprehensions* of the truths which they profess to hold! How inadequate is their sense of the evil of sin, of the majesty of God, of the excellency of Christ, of the beauty of holiness, or of any one spiritual truth whatever! The truth is, that we are looking for "peace" "in the ways" of sin, as much as the heathen themselves, and,

^e John viii. 12.

^f Rev. xxi. 23.

^g Gen. i. 3.

^h Job xxxviii. 36.

ⁱ Jam. i. 17.

^k John i. 14.

^l 1 Cor. i. 21.

notwithstanding all our advantages, are, like them, “in darkness and the shadow of death,” on the very confines of destruction.]

To dispel this darkness He came into the world—

[Human reason could not break through the clouds with which we were enveloped; still less could the lucubrations of reason convert the soul to God. No way for reconciliation with God could ever have been found out by mortal man. To make reconciliation for him, to reveal it to him, and to render it available for his eternal welfare, were the great objects of the Saviour’s incarnation: He visited our world “to give light to them who sat in darkness and the shadow of death, and to guide their feet into the way of peace:” and every soul that avails himself of the Saviour’s instructions, shall be “turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God.^m”]

Already, methinks, you begin to see,

III. The unbounded mercy of God displayed in it—

Well is it traced to “the tender mercy of our God”—

[To what else can we trace it? What could man do to *merit* such a gift as that of God’s only dear Son? — — — But the expression in my text deserves particular notice. The words import, “the bowels of mercy,” which were moved in commiseration of our fallen stateⁿ. Conceive of God as looking upon our first parents after the fall, and as saying concerning them, as he did concerning his people Israel; “How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee up, Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me: my repentings are kindled together: I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger^o.” Yes indeed, this will give a just view of the compassion which moved Almighty God to send his Son for the redemption of a ruined world — — —]

And can we withhold our admiration from this stupendous act of mercy?

[Let us only contemplate the benefits we receive from the material sun. Suppose we had been from the first moment of our existence in the state in which large districts of the habitable globe are for one half of the year: suppose we had been in utter darkness even until now; and God had unexpectedly, and unsolicited, caused the sun to visit us in meridian splendour: Would there have been any bounds to our admiration or gratitude? — — — What then shall we say now that he has caused “the Sun of Righteousness to shine upon us,” and “the day-star

^m Acts xxvi. 18.

ⁿ *σπλάγχνα ἐλέους.*

^o Hos. ii. 8, 9.

to arise in our very hearts^p?" Verily, "if we do not bless him, the stones will cry out against us"^q — — —]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are yet sitting in darkness—

[This is the state of the whole unconverted world. If a man feeling in his bosom the ranklings of anger and hatred, "is in darkness even until now^r," what must they be who are living altogether to themselves and to the world? Think what ye may, ye are "in the shadow of death," and on the very confines of destruction — — — I pray you improve the opportunity now afforded you, and "whilst you have the light, walk in the light, that ye may be the children of light" — — —]

2. Those who have been "brought out of darkness into the marvellous light of the Gospel"—

[Bless ye your God: bless him without ceasing: bless him with your whole hearts. Is it a pleasant thing to behold the sun? What delight then must ye have in beholding the glory of God as beaming forth in the face of Jesus Christ! — — — See then that ye walk worthy of this great mercy: for "if ye walk in the light as he is in the light, then shall ye have sweet fellowship with the Father and the Son, and the blood of Jesus Christ shall cleanse you from all sin^s." Let Christ be your light in this world, and you shall dwell in the beams of his meridian glory for ever and ever.]

^p 2 Pet. i. 19.

^r 1 John ii. 9.

^q See Eph. ii. 4, 7.

^s 1 John i. 7.

MCCCCLXXI.

CHRIST'S INCARNATION GLAD TIDINGS TO ALL.

Luke ii. 10, 11. *Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.*

IT has pleased God on many occasions to confer upon the poor some peculiar tokens of his regard: he has even "chosen them," in preference to all others, "to be rich in faith and heirs of his kingdom." But, as though he had designed to mark with special approbation the exertions of honest industry, he has vouchsafed his most distinguished favours to them at a time when they have been employed in the

duties of their respective callings. Gideon, “who was of a poor family of Manasseh, and the least in his father’s house,” was threshing his father’s wheat, when he was called to judge and to deliver Israel^a. Saul, who also was “of the least family belonging to the least of all the tribes,” was seeking his father’s asses, when he was anointed to be king over Israel^b. David also, the least of Jesse’s family, was brought from the sheepfold, that, from tending his father’s sheep, he might be exalted to the throne, and be made the shepherd, and king, of God’s peculiar people^c. Thus, when God had sent his dear Son into the world, he commissioned an angel to announce the tidings of his advent. But to whom did he send the angel? to Herod, or the chief priests? No: but to poor shepherds, who, for the security of their sheep, and their own mutual convenience, were keeping their watches, in rotation, through the night^d. To fix their attention, and to counteract the scandal which the tidings themselves would occasion, (for it must seem strange indeed to hear of the Saviour of the world, and the Lord of Glory, lying in a manger,) the angel appeared clothed with light, such light as clearly indicated the dignity of the messenger, and the importance of the message. Having dispelled the fears which his first appearance had excited in their minds, he addressed them in the words which we have just read: in elucidating which, we shall consider,

I. The tidings announced---

The birth of Jesus is here declared: and the city wherein he was born is specified in appropriate terms, in order that the accomplishment of that prophecy which had foretold the place of his birth might be distinctly seen and acknowledged^e. The description

^a Judg. vi. 11, 15.

^b 1 Sam. ix. 3, 20, 21.

^c Ps. lxxviii. 70, 71. with 1 Sam. xvi. 11.

^d φυλάσσωτες φυλακὰς τῆς νυκτὸς, *Keeping (by turns) the watches of the night.* ver. 8.

^e Mic. v. 2.

here given of Jesus is worthy of our deepest attention. The angel describes him by,

1. His office—

[Many saviours had been sent to Israel in former ages^f: but here was one infinitely superior to them all; one who came to deliver, not one people only, but a whole world; not from temporal bondage or misery, but from sin and Satan, death and hell———]

2. His right and title to it—

[The name “Christ,” as also the name “Messiah,” signifies ‘Anointed:’ and it was the name by which the great Deliverer was expected both by the Jewish and Gentile world^g. Now this name denoted his divine commission, together with his super-eminent qualifications for the performance of his office. The kings and priests, and, in some instances, the prophets also, were set apart for their respective offices by a holy unction. And he, in whom all these offices were combined, was consecrated to them by a public and immeasurable effusion of the Holy Ghost^h. He was no unauthorized obtruder; but a Saviour duly sent and qualified.]

3. His sufficiency for it—

[Had the person announced as a Saviour been a mere creature, he never could have effected all that was necessary for those whom he came to save. But he was “the Lord,” even Jehovah himself. It had been said of him by the prophet, eight hundred years before, “To us a Child is born, to us a Son is given; and his name shall be called, The Mighty Godⁱ,” and that prophecy was declared to be now accomplished. Consequently, whatever he had undertaken, he was able to perform: his atonement would be sufficient to expiate the sins of the whole world: his righteousness would be sufficient to justify all that should trust in it for acceptance: and his grace would be sufficient to make them conquerors over all their enemies.]

Together with the tidings themselves, the angel announced also,

II. The importance of them—

The term, “behold,” is always used to mark the importance of that to which it is prefixed. But here

^f Neh. ix. 27.

^g John iv. 25. It was not a Jewess, but a Samaritan, that said this.

^h Luke iii. 22. and iv. 18. with Ps. xlv. 7. and John iii. 34.

ⁱ Isai. ix. 6.

the precise view in which the tidings claim our attention is distinctly specified. They are a matter,

1. Of exceeding joy—

[To illustrate this, we need only observe *by whom* the message was delivered, and *to whom*. An angel was the messenger: but he was not privileged to say, “To *us* is born a Saviour:” no; there was no Saviour provided for the fallen angels: but for man, when *he* fell. God became incarnate: “he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham^k.” Suppose then, that instead of being sent to *men*, the angel had been sent to his fallen brethren; and that, having opened the gates of hell, he had announced the tidings to the apostate spirits, “To *you* is sent a Saviour!” O what joy had been diffused through those miserable regions! How would the vaults of hell have rung with acclamations and hosannas! How would every spirit instantly have forgotten his pains, and pressed forward to hear the full import of this astonishing message! Thus then ought the tidings to be received amongst us: since the only difference between them and us is, that on *them* is executed the sentence they deserve, and *we* are shut up in prison, waiting to have the same executed upon us, as soon as the full measure of our iniquities shall be completed.]

2. Of universal joy—

[These tidings were equally interesting to Jews and Gentiles; to those of the apostolic age, and to us who live at such a distance, both of time and place. Nor is there one among the children of men who has not equal cause to value the Saviour that is here announced. *Who is there that does not need* the merit of his atonement and the efficacy of his grace? *And who is there to whom they are not freely offered?* There is not one on earth who can be saved without them; nor is there one, however abandoned, who may not, by a believing application to the Saviour, be interested in them. Well therefore may they be called good tidings “to all people;” since they are so to all, of every age, and of every description: and well may the prophet call on the whole creation to shout for joy^l.]

We CONCLUDE with inviting you all to imitate the shepherds:

1. Inquire into the truth of the tidings you have heard—

[The shepherds instantly went to Bethlehem, to see with their own eyes the truth of what they had heard^m. To you

^k Heb. ii. 16.

^l Isai. xlv. 23.

^m ver. 15.

then we say, "Go to Bethlehem," or rather, Go to the Bible, and search whether these things be not as they have been represented? What would you have thought of the shepherds, if, when they had such an opportunity of obtaining satisfaction on the point, they had neglected it, and had laid themselves down to sleep? O be not ye such yourselves. You have incomparably better means of information than they had. You may see the whole record concerning this holy Child; his birth, his life, his death, his resurrection, his ascension, yea, you may see the union of the Godhead with his human-nature, and may read, in facts as well as in declarations, his ability to save you to the uttermost. O arise, and inquire into these deep mysteries, with all the humility and attention they demand.]

2. When convinced of the truth of them yourselves, communicate them diligently to others—

[The shepherds would not hide within their own bosoms the things they had heard and seen, but published them abroad for the information of others alsoⁿ. And should you be silent? When you have so much clearer instruction to convey, should you not impart it gladly to those around you? Remember, that if you have the knowledge of Christ as the only and all-sufficient Saviour, you are on no account to put that light under a bushel, but to make use of it that you may guide others also into the way of peace.]

3. Make them the theme of your joyful praises in the midst of your earthly business—

[“The shepherds returned glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen^o :” they forsook not their duty: but returned to it in a joyful and devout frame of mind. A discovery of the deep things of God is not intended to take us out of the situations in life which we have been called to fill; but to make us holy, and happy in them. Let this effect be wrought on you. Neglect not your worldly occupations, whatever they may be; but serve God in them, and abound in praises and thanksgivings for that which has been revealed unto you. However mean or toilsome your vocation be, care not for it; but make it to appear, that the knowledge of this Saviour can render any yoke easy, and afford a joy which the world can neither give nor take away.]

ⁿ ver. 17.

^o ver. 20.

MCCCCLXXII.

THE ANGELS' SONG.

Luke ii. 13, 14. *And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will toward men.*

THE circumstances of our Saviour's birth characterize in a measure, the dispensation which he came to introduce. The Gospel exhibits a plain, yet profound, scheme of salvation: while its great outlines are intelligible to the meanest capacity, it abounds with the most sublime, and inscrutable mysteries. Thus, in the incarnation of our Lord, there was a meanness, which seemed unsuitable to such an occasion; and at the same time a majesty, that was worthy the person and character of the new-born infant: he was born, not in a palace, but a stable, and had only a manger for his reception: yet did an angel come from heaven to announce his birth; and a multitude of the heavenly host attended to proclaim his praise.

In this divine hymn the incarnation of Christ is represented in a two-fold view:

I. As a subject for our deepest contemplation—

The subject itself is announced in those words of the angel to the shepherds, "Unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." And, in honour of this marvellous event, a multitude of the heavenly host break forth into strains, so abrupt, as to need much careful elucidation, and so ardent, as to express as fully as possible what angels feel in the contemplation of this divine mystery.

Behold, "peace" now exists "on earth"—

[The whole race of man had fallen, and were subjected to God's heavy displeasure. Nor was there on man's part any possibility of restoring himself to the Divine favour. But God devised a mode for reconciling the world unto himself through the intervention of his only dear Son. On his co-equal, co-eternal Son, who was "the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person," "he laid our iniquities," that so, his justice being satisfied by an atonement in our behalf, reconciliation might be effected for us in perfect consistency with all the Divine perfections. Hence peace was brought down from heaven to earth, through the sufferings of our incarnate God, who is therefore emphatically called "the Prince of Peace." Now every sinner in the universe may have peace with God, and in his own conscience, if only he welcome this Saviour into his heart, and believe in him as God's appointed instrument for the salvation of the world.]

And now also is revealed "good-will toward men"—

[The strongest possible *evidence* of God's love to men was, the gift of his only dear Son, to die for them. In this view the incarnation of our blessed Lord is always spoken of^a; and Jehovah himself is represented as *commending* his love to us in, and by, this marvellous event^b.

But far more than this is comprehended in the expression here used by the holy angels. I understand by it, that, through the incarnation of Christ, *a full scope is given to the exercise of God's "good-will to man,"* so that it can flow down in the richest abundance into the soul of every one that is "at peace" with him. Yes, to every believing soul "will God manifest himself as he does not unto the world," and "dwell in him, and abide with him," and give a spirit of adoption, yea, and the witness of the Spirit to attest to him the relation in which he stands to God," and will "rejoice over him to do him good," "rejoicing over him with joy, and resting in his love, and joying over him with singing." [There is no expression of good-will which a believing soul is capable of receiving from God, which shall not, more or less, be vouchsafed by God to every one that is at peace with him through faith in Christ.]

And by all this is "the highest possible glory reflected upon God himself"—

[There is not a perfection of the Deity which is not honoured by this, yea, and more honoured than ever it was before. Wisdom and goodness and power and love had been displayed before in the formation of angels, and in the blessedness diffused throughout the whole creation, and in the perfect adaptation of every thing to its proper end. Holiness too and justice had been rendered conspicuous by the expulsion of all the fallen angels from heaven, and the consigning of them over to everlasting misery in hell. But there had been no trace of *mercy* to be seen in any corner of the universe: nor could the highest intelligence in heaven conceive how the exercise of this perfection could consist with the rights of justice. But now the union and harmony of all the Divine perfections was seen through the incarnation and death of God's only dear Son, justice exercised in a way of mercy, and mercy in a way of justice, or, as the Psalmist expresses it, "Mercy and truth meeting together, and righteousness and peace kissing each other." Well then did the angels sing, "Glory to God in the highest." They had seen no "peace" proclaimed *in heaven*; no expression of "good-will" towards the fallen *angels*: but towards *men on earth* both were most gloriously displayed. Hence with wonder and admiration this

^a John iii. 16. 1 John iv. 10.

^b Rom. v. 8.

blessed assembly pour forth their praises in this *appropriate* song, “Glory to God *in the highest*; peace *on earth*, good-will *towards men.*”]

But to contemplate this subject will be of no use, unless we enter fully into it,

II. As a mercy devoutly to be acknowledged—

The angels, though in comparison of us they had no interest in this event, came down from heaven to celebrate and proclaim it. And shall not we celebrate it? Shall so much as one of us remain indifferent, now that the glad tidings of it are brought to our ears? Consider, I pray you,

1. Your own personal interest in it—

[Where would all of you have been, if God had not devised and executed these means for your restoration to his favour? You had all participated in the guilt of the fallen angels, and must all have partaken of their misery. What could you have done more than they to avert or mitigate your doom? You would have lived only to fill up the measure of your iniquities, and would then have been reserved, like those unhappy spirits, in chains of darkness to the judgment of the great day. But, through the substitution of God’s only dear Son in your place, and the atonement he has offered in your behalf, there is not so much as one of you that may not be reconciled to God, and made an everlasting object of his favour. In fact, I who speak to you at this moment, am “an ambassador from God to announce to you these glad tidings.” To me, as his servant, is “committed the ministry of reconciliation, to declare, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them:” and at this very moment it is as if the Lord Jesus Christ himself addressed you: for, as bearing his commission, and actually representing him, “I now beseech you all in Christ’s stead, Be ye reconciled to God^c.” Will not *ye* then adore God for this revelation of his mercy to you? Will ye not all rise as one man to welcome this Saviour, and adore him, and to seek through him the blessings he is come to impart? What if such a revelation of mercy were sent to the fallen angels, do you think *they* would hear it with indifference? Or, if they did hear it with indifference, is there so much as one of you that would not say, “Leave them to themselves; their damnation is just?” Know then, that in condemning them, you condemn yourselves; and “out of your own mouth will God condemn

^c 2 Cor. v. 18—20. This must not be confined to the Apostles.

you" at the last day. But I hope better things of you, my brethren; and I call upon you all now at this very moment, in spirit at least, to join the angelic choir, and sing, 'Glory to God in the highest, who has opened such a way for the effecting of *my* reconciliation with him, and for these wonderful displays of good-will to *my* guilty soul.'

2. The glory that will accrue to God from it to all eternity—

[But for this revelation of God's mercy to us, there would have been little difference between earth and hell: for God would have been no more glorified in the one than in the other. But God is glorified in the midst of us: I trust there are in this very assembly, some at least, who have found peace with God, and can attest from their own experience how sweet are the manifestations of his good-will to their souls. And the time is shortly coming when "all shall know the Lord from the least to the greatest," and "all flesh shall see the salvation of God." And O what a place will this wretched world *then* be! What bright manifestations of the Saviour will then be vouchsafed to men! Methinks, the visions of Mount Tabor will then be common upon earth, and this song of angels will become the common tone of intercourse between man and man throughout the whole world.

But raise your thoughts to heaven, my brethren, and consider for a moment what is passing there. *There* are already millions of redeemed souls that rest not day or night from these songs of praise. There the chorus is swelling louder and louder every day by the accession of saints made perfect, every one having tuned his harp to the heavenly song, and bursting forth at his first entrance into heaven into acclamations and hosannas that shall never end. And what shall we say of that period when all the assembly of the redeemed, together with all the holy angels, shall join in one universal uninterrupted song: "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and glory, and honour, and blessing; therefore blessing, and honour, and glory, and power be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever^d." Can you, my brethren, contemplate that day, and not rejoice in the expectation of it, and long to be found in the happy number of the redeemed? I call upon you; then, yea I charge you all in the name of the Most High God, to begin this very day this heavenly song. Leave to an ungodly world to make this a season of carnal festivity: make *ye* it a season of holy joy; a very anticipation of heaven itself.]

^d Rev. v. 11—13.

APPLICATION—

[But I cannot close the subject without entreating you all to imitate the conduct of these holy angels. They were not content with being happy themselves; they sought to promote the happiness of others by making known to them these glad tidings, and setting them an example of the frame of mind which they should cultivate. This is the way in which I would recommend to *you*, my brethren, to spend this holy season. Let each according to his ability improve the opportunities that are afforded him, of diffusing far and wide this divine knowledge, and of stimulating all around him to the attainment and the exercise of this heavenly joy.]

MCCCCLXXIII.

INQUIRY INTO THE GOSPEL RECOMMENDED.

LUKE II. 15. *Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.*

IT is a rich mercy to have a faithful instructor, who will declare unto us the whole counsel of God. But, to obtain any solid benefit, we must search into the truths we hear, and endeavour to get a deep impression of them upon our minds. Without care and diligence on our parts, it would be to little purpose to enjoy the ministry of Paul himself, or even of angels from heaven. What would the shepherds have been profited by the tidings which the angels announced to them respecting the Saviour's birth, if, like too many amongst us, they had contented themselves with admiring the eloquence of the chief speaker, or the sweetness and melody of the hymn they sang? They set us a good example: they thought not of amusement, but of edification; not of the manner in which the messengers performed their part, but of the truths delivered by them: and no sooner had their heavenly instructors left them to themselves, than they proposed to go immediately and examine into the things which had been made known unto them.

From this striking incident we shall take occasion to set before you,

I. The event referred to—

In the preceding context we are informed what the tidings were, which were brought by the angels—

[These tidings were, *that a Saviour was that very day born into the world.* A general expectation prevailed among the Jews that about that time a person of most extraordinary character should be born in their land, and should become a Saviour to the Jewish people. Very erroneous notions indeed obtained respecting the nature of the benefits which he would impart to them: but the more enlightened persons among them extended their views beyond a mere temporal deliverance, and looked forward to spiritual and eternal blessings. The advent of this person was now proclaimed to the shepherds; and it was declared, that the Child was born “in the city of David, as the prophets had foretold^a; and, that not the Jews only, but “all the nations” of the earth, were interested in the salvation which he was come to effect.

The tidings yet further intimated, *that the new-born infant was none other than “the Lord of Glory.”* It was no common child whose birth was announced: though he partook of flesh and blood, yet was he possessed of a nature infinitely superior to that of men or angels. The shepherds were informed that “the Child which was born, and the Son that was given, was,” as Isaiah had foretold, “the Mighty God^b,” even “Emmanuel God with us^c.” As the salvation which he was to accomplish was to be extended to all people, so he was fitted for his work, being the omnipotent Jehovah, who could not fail of success in whatever he undertook.

Lastly, it was declared, *that notwithstanding the dignity of his person, and the greatness of his office, he was to be found in a state of the deepest humiliation.* It was not in the palaces of Herod or the high-priest, or in the mansions of the great and noble, that this Child was to be found: no; they must go and look for him in the stable of an inn; and they would “find him wrapped in swaddling-clothes, and lying in a manger,” like one that was ordained to be “a worm and no man, a reproach of men, and despised of the people^d.”]

The same tidings are announced to us at this day—

[No angels are now sent, or need to be sent, on such messages, because the Scriptures give us all the information that we can desire. But ministers are ambassadors from God: and are commissioned from God to declare the same joyful tidings as were conveyed to the shepherds by the heavenly hosts. We then make known to you, that that very Jesus, who once lay in the womb of the blessed Virgin, and who, at

^a Mic. v. 2. ^b Isai. ix. 6. ^c Isai. vii. 14. ^d Ps. xxii. 6.

his birth had no other mansion than a stable, no other cradle than a manger, that same Jesus, I say, was “God manifest in the flesh^e,” even “God over all blessed for ever^f. We moreover declare unto you, that he is “the Saviour of the world,” and that “there is no other name given under heaven whereby we can be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ^g.”]

From the regard which the shepherds paid to this event, we proceed to shew you,

II. The inquiries to be made concerning it—

No message that comes from God ought to be treated with contempt; much less should one that is of such mysterious import, such universal concern.

Inquire then into,

1. The truth of the fact—

[There is something so marvellous, and almost incredible, in the idea of God becoming man, in order to save a ruined world, that it should not be hastily embraced, no, not even though it were declared by an angel from heaven. It becomes us to examine what can be adduced in confirmation of it. We should, with the Bereans, “search the Scriptures daily, to see if these things be so^h.” We should inquire whether the prophets spake any thing respecting this great eventⁱ; whether they gave any reason to believe, that God would ever take upon him our nature, and accomplish our salvation in so strange a way^k. We should inquire what proof the Apostles had, that they were rightly informed; and what evidence there is, that, in relating these things to us, they were divinely inspired^l. In short, we should, if I may so speak, “go to Bethlehem,” and see for ourselves; yea, we should “make haste” to do so, lest we lose the opportunity afforded us, or become indifferent to the report itself.]

2. The grounds and reasons of it—

[It cannot be that such an event should ever have taken place without some urgent necessity. We should therefore inquire what occasion there was for it. If we do this, we shall find that among the various reasons that will occur to the mind, there are two peculiarly prominent, two that will sufficiently account for the whole mystery; and these are, *Man's happiness*, and *God's honour*. Without the incarnation and death of the Son of God, man could never have attained to happiness. He was reduced to the state of the fallen angels in respect of

^e 1 Tim. iii. 16.

^f Rom. ix. 5.

^g Acts iv. 12.

^h Acts xvii. 11.

ⁱ 1 Pet. i. 10, 11.

^k Mic. v. 2. Isai. ix. 6. and vii. 14. ^l 2 Tim. iii. 16. 2 Pet. i. 21.

guilt; and he must have resembled them in respect of misery, if such a way had not been devised and executed for his recovery. Moreover, it was in this way only that God could save man, and at the same time maintain the honour of his own perfections. Without an atonement, his justice could not be satisfied: nor could his mercy be exercised in consistency with his truth and holiness. It was, that “mercy and truth might meet together, and that righteousness and peace might kiss each other^m;” it was for this end, I say, that our God became incarnate: and the more we examine into the reasons of this mysterious dispensation, the more we shall be satisfied, that it is in every respect worthy of its Divine Author.]

3. Its use and importance—

[We are not to amuse ourselves with empty speculations upon such momentous points as this; but to inquire into their practical use and importance. Now these tidings will upon examination be found as important to us as to any people at any period of the world. Our first and great concern is, How may we be reconciled to our offended God? To this we find a complete and satisfactory answer in the event referred to. The Lord Jesus Christ has become a mediator between God and man; he has taken our nature, in order that he might “bear our sins in his own sacred body,” and work out a righteousness whereby we might be justified; so that “God may now be just, and yet the justifier of all that believeⁿ.” In this mystery the burthened conscience finds rest and peace. From this, the vilest of the human race may take encouragement to return to God; and be fully assured, that, for Christ’s sake, all his iniquities shall be pardoned, and not one of them be remembered against him any more for ever^o. Surely then we should spare no pains in investigating these things, that so we may derive from them the consolation and happiness they are intended to convey.]

To recommend yet further this spirit of inquiry, we shall CONCLUDE, with shewing you the benefits that will result from it :

1. You will receive conviction in your own minds—

[The shepherds did not doubt the veracity of the angels; but their faith was certainly confirmed, when they had ocular demonstration of the fact that had been related to them. Thus, though we may not really disbelieve the incarnation of God’s co-equal, co-eternal Son, or doubt whether he be the only, and all-sufficient Saviour of the world, yet the more we examine the Scriptures with humility and prayer, the more deep will be our insight into this “great mystery of godliness,” and the more

^m Ps. lxxxv. 10.

ⁿ Rom. iii. 25, 26.

^o Heb. viii. 12.

shall we attain “a full assurance of understanding” with respect to it.

Let this then incline us to go with one accord to Bethlehem, and to commence the pious search: yea, let the hope and prospect of so rich a benefit stimulate us to united and instantaneous exertions.]

2. You will be disposed to communicate the joyful tidings to others—

[This was the first-fruit of the conviction which the shepherds had received: “When they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this Child^p.” And will you be contented to “put your light under a bushel?” Will you not rather imitate the famished lepers, who when they had found the Syrian camp deserted, and a vast plenty of provisions and booty of every kind lying unprotected, “said one to another, We do not well: this day is a day of good tidings; and we hold our peace: now therefore come, that we may go and tell the king’s household^q?” You find in general, that persons are averse to speak of the great mysteries of redemption, because they have so little considered them: on the contrary, they who feel the importance of them, cannot be restrained from speaking of them: and if they be derided or menaced for their zeal, they will give the same answer as the Apostles did, “We cannot but speak of the things which we have seen and heard^r.”]

3. You will abound in praises and thanksgivings to God for them—

[In this respect also the shepherds manifested the fruits of diligent and humble inquiry: “They returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them^s.” And shall not we feel a similar disposition, if once our hearts be duly impressed with these things? Yes: if we “muse as we ought, the fire will kindle, and at last we shall speak with our tongues^t.” We shall vie even with the angelic hosts in singing, “Glory to God in the highest for the peace which is brought down on earth, and the good-will that is thereby expressed towards man.”

If, then, our fellow-creatures have any claim upon us for the benefit of our instructions, or God has any demands upon our gratitude for the stupendous mercies he has vouchsafed unto us, then should we search with diligence into the truths that are revealed, in order that we may be quickened to the performance of our duty, and be stimulated to pay our tribute of love to man, and of praise to God.]

^p ver. 17.

^q 2 Kings vii. 8, 9.

^r Acts iv. 19, 20.

^s ver. 20.

^t Ps. xxxix. 3.

MCCCCLXXIV.

THE CIRCUMCISION OF CHRIST.

Luke ii. 21. *And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called JESUS, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb.*

THE naming of children has often been used, not merely for distinction's sake, but also to express some expectation or wish which the parent entertained respecting his child. Of course, the name must frequently have ill-suited the character of the person that bore it. This was remarkably the case with the two first children that were born into the world. Adam named the first Cain, (which signifies *getting*,) supposing that he had *gotten* that Promised Seed who was to repair the ruins of the fall: and his second son he named Abel (*vanity*), having already had abundant evidence of the sinful dispositions of Cain. But in both he was mistaken; for the former proved a murderer; and the latter a distinguished saint.

But God has on several occasions condescended to give names to children previous to their conception in the womb: and the names so given have always designated the real character of the persons themselves. We are particularly informed, that God required the child which he gave to Zacharias and Elizabeth to be called John, which means *grace* or *favour*; because, whilst he was a *favour* bestowed on them, he was to be an object of God's peculiar favour, and an occasion of much good to others^a.

The name of JESUS also was given by the angel to the Virgin's Child, "before he was conceived in her womb." And how significant this was, it is scarcely needful to mention. It was the same name with Joshua, and meant *Divine Saviour*: and was therefore most fitly given to Him, who was "Emmanuel, God with us," and who was destined "to save his people from their sins^b." The time of imposing the

^a Luke i. 13, 14.

^b For a fuller explanation of this, see Disc. on Matt. i. 21—23.

name on a child was generally that of his circumcision. It was thus in the case of John^c, as also in that of Jesus: the solemnity of that rite giving an additional weight to the name imposed.

But it is to the rite itself, that is, to circumcision, that we shall confine our attention at this time: for, in point of importance, it seems to have been the first and greatest of all the ordinances among the Jews. We propose to shew,

I. The nature and intent of circumcision—

It was originally given to Abraham as a seal of the covenant of *grace*—

[God made a covenant with Abraham, to give him a numerous posterity, with the land of Canaan for their inheritance; and at last one particular Seed, “in whom all the nations of the earth should be blessed.” This promise Abraham believed; and he looked forward to that peculiar Seed as the true and only source of blessings to himself. In consequence of this faith, he was accepted of God; who engaged to treat him as a righteous person, through the righteousness of the Saviour imputed to him^d. And in token that he would execute every part of this gracious covenant, he appointed him and all his posterity to be circumcised. This is the account which St. Paul himself gives of this ordinance: he calls it a “*sign*,” and a “*seal* :” a “*sign*” to Abraham and his seed, that they were the Lord’s peculiar people; and a “*seal*” to them, that God would be his and their God, provided they walked in the faith, and in the steps of their father Abraham^e. As a *sign*, it shewed them their engagements to God; and as a *seal*, God’s engagements to them.]

But, as continued to the Jews, in and after the days of Moses, it was a seal of the covenant of works—

[The Mosaic covenant differed materially from that of Abraham, and yet the same ordinance was a seal to both. The rite of circumcision was absolutely indispensable to all^f: it was invariably the rite, by which, and by which alone, any persons, whether infants or adults, were initiated into that covenant. And in what light were they taught to view it? We answer, as binding them to an observance of the whole law of Moses, and as suspending their salvation on their performance of this condition. In this light St. Peter viewed it,

^c Luke i. 59—63. ^d Rom. iv. 3, 18—25. ^e Rom. iv. 11, 12.

^f Gen. xvii. 14. It was equally enjoined by the law. Compare Exod. xii. 48. with John vii. 22.

when that famous controversy respecting circumcision was brought before the whole College of Apostles at Jerusalem: he reprov'd those who insisted on the observance of that rite, for "putting a yoke upon the Christians, which not even the most eminent among the Jews had been able to bear^g." Of course, if circumcision had not bound them to the observance of the whole law of Moses, there could have been no foundation for this objection. St. Paul yet more strongly confirms this statement: for he says to those who were in danger of being misled by the Judaizing Christians, "Behold, I Paul say unto you, that, if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing: for I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that *he is a debtor to do the whole law*^h." Here then the point is clear; that though circumcision was given *primarily* as a seal of the covenant of grace, it was *eventually* (though not expressly called so) a seal of the covenant of works also. From the time that it was first instituted, it continued to be a *sign* and a *seal*; but the privileges of which they were a seal, and the obligations of which they were a sign, varied according to the nature of the covenant to which the rite itself was annexed: to Abraham, it sealed the covenant of *grace*; to Moses and the Jews, the covenant of *works*.]

This view of the rite will throw light upon,

II. The reasons of our Lord's submitting to it—

These were chiefly two;

1. That he might appear to be the Promised Seed—

[The Person in whom all the nations of the earth were to be blessed, was marked out by God as one particular individual, who should in due time arise, and in whom "the covenant made with Abraham should be confirmed." St. Paul infers this from the very term used on that occasion being in the singular number: and though we should not have conceded to him that inference, *as a critic*, we doubt not but that the truth he affirms, was intended, by the Holy Ghost, to be marked in that very expression on which he founds his remarkⁱ. At all events, the Messiah was to be of the posterity of Abraham; all of whom were circumcised: therefore, if Jesus were not circumcised, he could have no claim, no allowable claim, to this distinction: whatever he might be, he could not be acknowledged to be a child of Abraham. It is true, this mark could not distinguish him as the Messiah, because it was common to all the Jews: but the want of it would have been an infallible proof that he was not the Messiah; and therefore he submitted to receive it.]

^g Acts. xv. 1;-10.

^h Gal. v. 2, 3.

ⁱ Gal. iii. 16.

2. That he might be fully under the obligations of the Mosaic law—

[Mankind at large were subject only to the moral law; and therefore for *their* redemption it would have been sufficient for the Son of God to assume our nature: but the house of Israel, for whose salvation he was sent in the first instance, were under the ceremonial law; and therefore for *their* redemption he must be made under that also. This is particularly noticed by St. Paul, who says, that “in the fulness of time God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, *made under the law*, that he might redeem *them that were under the law*^k.” Now it was by circumcision that the children of the Jews were initiated into the Mosaic covenant, and brought fully into subjection to the law. Hence therefore Christ submitted to circumcision, and acknowledged at all times his obligation to obey that law in every thing. He says himself, “I am not come to destroy the law and the prophets, but to fulfil them.” There is one very remarkable instance of his obedience to the law, which reflects considerable light on the subject before us. Baptism was not any part of the original law: but it had been introduced as an additional rite for the admission of proselytes into the Jewish religion: and the introduction of it had been so far sanctioned by God himself, that John, the forerunner of our Lord, was expressly commissioned to baptize all who desired an admission into the kingdom of the Messiah. Hence Jesus Christ himself went to be baptized of him: and upon John’s declining it as unsuitable to the dignity of our Lord, Jesus said to him, “Suffer it to be so now; for thus *it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness*^l.” The same strict adherence to the law was observable in him at all times, except when the execution of his high office, and the establishment of his Divine authority, required a temporary deviation from it. Indeed, he not only fulfilled the law, but was himself the completion of it; every part of it being accomplished in him as its great prototype. In a word, if he would redeem mankind, he must do it by obeying that law which we had broken, and enduring those penalties which we had incurred. This therefore he undertook to do, that, by his atoning sufferings and perfect obedience, he might restore us to our forfeited inheritance. Of this work his circumcision was the commencement: it was the commencement of those sufferings which constitute his atoning sacrifice, and of that obedience which constitutes our justifying righteousness. It was the commencement of that “work which God had given him to do,” and which terminated at last in what the Apostle fitly calls, “his obedience unto death.”]

^k Gal. iv. 4, 5.

^l Matt. iii. 15.

Let us now turn our attention to,

III. The lessons, which his submission to it may teach us—

It may well teach us,

1. To observe the instituted ordinances of our religion—

[Circumcision, with respect to us, is done away, and is superseded by the milder rite of baptism. But baptism is as necessary for us, as circumcision was to the Jews; and it is to be administered to the very same persons.

We know that this is a point disputed by many; who are fond of bringing forward the controversy on all occasions. Far be it from us to encourage a controversial spirit: we would avoid it, and discourage it, to the utmost of our power. Yet it is necessary that we should instruct those who are under our charge in all things relating to their duty; and therefore, without offence to others, we may be allowed to state with plainness our views and sentiments.

Two reasons in particular are urged for not administering baptism to infants: the one is, that we are not any where commanded to do so; the other is, that children are not capable of all the ends of baptism; since baptism presupposes a knowledge and approbation of those principles, into which we are baptized.

But to this we answer, What occasion was there for renewed orders concerning a thing that had already existed two thousand years? A rite more suited to our dispensation was introduced; but the persons interested in it were not therefore deprived of their birthright. If it was intended to abridge the privileges of children, we might well expect that such an intension should have been expressed: but where has God expressed it? and who but God can take away the privileges which God has given?

Again: If it be any argument against the baptism of children, that they cannot understand the principles which they become pledged to maintain, it is equally so against the circumcision of infants: and whosoever will condemn *that*, let him answer it to God.

Be it so; children are not capable of all the ends of baptism. But was Christ capable of all the ends of circumcision? was not one end of it to put away (emblematically then, and really afterwards) the lusts of the flesh? But had *he* any lusts to put away? Yet he was circumcised: and consequently, children may now be baptized, though they be not capable of all the ends of baptism.

Once more: Are not children capable of receiving the blessings of the covenant? for our Lord says, "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God." And if they are capable of the *blessings* of the covenant, are they not also of the *seal*; when that seal is nothing more than a token from God that the blessings shall be theirs?

We have said thus much, not for the sake of stirring up controversy, but of confirming you in the principles, which, as members of the Church of England, you profess.

This only we add, that if Jesus Christ submitted to circumcision for the good of his enemies, much more should you consult the benefit of your children by dedicating them to God in baptism.]

2. To seek that purity of which circumcision was an emblem—

[What the true circumcision was, we are abundantly informed both by Moses and the prophets^m. Even at that time circumcision, if not accompanied with a suitable course of life, was accounted for uncircumcision: and much more, under our dispensation, must those only be accounted Christians, who are such in deed and in truthⁿ. We will call upon you all then, not to rest in your baptism, as though that made you Christians, but to seek the baptism of the Holy Ghost, and "the answer of a good conscience towards God^o." It is remarkable that St. Paul represents this very purification as the thing intended to be produced by the circumcision of Christ. We are (federally) "circumcised in him:" but (personally) we are to "put away the body of the sins of the flesh^p." And the very promise which God has given us, is, that "he will circumcise our hearts, to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and with all our soul^q." Look ye to it then, my brethren, that this seal of our covenant be found in you. "Put off the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and put on the new man, which after God is renewed in righteousness and true holiness." It may be painful thus to mortify the flesh; but it must be done, if you would have any well-founded hope towards God: for, notwithstanding "salvation is bestowed by grace through faith," yet it is an unalterable truth, that "they who are Christ's, have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts."^r]

^m Deut. x. 16. Jer. iv. 4.

ⁿ Rom. ii. 25, 28, 29.

^o 1 Pet. iii. 21.

^p Col. ii. 10, 11.

^q Deut. xxx. 6.

MCCCCLXXV.

PRESENTATION OF CHRIST IN THE TEMPLE.

Luke ii. 22—24. *And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord; (as it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord;) and to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtle-doves, or two young pigeons.*

IT is a comfortable consideration to the poor and ignorant, that they may possess the knowledge of salvation, though they have never been instructed in the nature of the Mosaic law, or seen its full connexion with Christianity. But it is certain that a comprehensive knowledge of the Scriptures tends exceedingly to establish us in the faith, and to quicken us to a holy obedience. The importance of being acquainted with the Old Testament, appears from the frequent reference which there is to it in the New Testament. Sometimes we meet with references put interrogatively, “What is written in the law?” “What saith the law?” and sometimes positively, “It is written in the law.” Hence it is obvious that, without an acquaintance with the law, much of the force and evidence of the Christian Scriptures must be lost: and therefore we cannot but earnestly recommend an attention to the Old Testament, as the means of more fully comprehending the New. In the short passage before us, we are directed no less than three times to compare the history with the ordinances which had before been given to Moses: the time of the Virgin’s purification, the offering she offered, and the presentation of her infant Son in the temple, are all said to be “according to the law of the Lord.” To that then we shall refer you, while we consider,

I. The purification of the mother—

For the elucidation of this subject, there are several distinct inquiries to be made—

What did the law enjoin in relation to purification after child-birth?

[A woman was deemed unclean for seven days after her deliverance from child-birth, so that she rendered every one unclean who even came in contact with her: and for thirty-three days afterwards she was not permitted to touch any holy thing, or to enter into the temple. The time was doubled for a female child: the mother was then more or less unclean for eighty days. She was then to come to the door of the tabernacle, and to present there a lamb and a pigeon; the pigeon for a sin-offering, and the lamb for a burnt-offering: by the sin-offering acknowledging her sinfulness, and by the burnt-offering testifying her gratitude for the mercies vouchsafed unto her. If the mother were poor, she might offer a pair of turtle-doves or two young pigeons; the burnt-offering might be suited to her means; but, whatever were her circumstances, her sin-offering must be the same: because the same atonement is necessary for all; but the modes of testifying our gratitude must vary according to our various situations in life^a.

Such was the ordinance itself. We proceed to ask,]

What sentiments was this law intended to convey?

[The very offerings which were presented on the occasion, intimated, that they who had experienced deliverance from child-birth had just occasion for renewed expressions of humiliation and gratitude. Such is the state of human nature since the fall; that a taint is contracted, and communicated also, by that law which was given to man in innocence, "Increase and multiply." David says, "I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." Indeed the very pangs of child-birth, remind all who are called to endure them, of the first transgression; and, as being inflicted on account of sin, they call for acknowledgments of our sinful state. This, I say, was intimated by the sin-offering, whereby "an atonement was made for her who offered it." The burnt-offering, as a token of gratitude, needs no comment; every one must see that it was proper for the occasion, and justly expressed what might be supposed to be the state of her mind.

Yet there is good reason to inquire,]

What necessity was there for the mother of our Lord to obey this law?

[Certainly, whatever taint may be contracted by others, none could have been by her on this occasion. Yet, as the manner of her conception was not generally known, and Joseph was her reputed husband, it was proper to comply with the requisitions of the law, as much as if she had borne a child in the common way. It would have ill become her to cast a stumbling-block before others on this occasion: and her own

^a See Lev. xii. 1—8.

heart was so full of love to God, that she counted nothing a burthen that she could do for him. She determined therefore, as Jesus himself did in the instance of his baptism, to fulfil all righteousness to the utmost of her power.

It may be asked however,]

What is this law to us ?

[Doubtless, as to the ceremonial part of it, it is abrogated altogether: but, as to its spiritual import, it speaks as loudly to us as ever it did to the Jews. *Humiliation* and *gratitude* are the proper fruits of mercies received: I say, *humiliation first*, and *then gratitude*. This is not the order in which these feelings arise in the *mind* of a philosopher: but it is the order in which they rise in the heart of a Christian: a sense of unworthiness abases his soul in the dust, and enhances, beyond all expression, the favours conferred upon him. We appeal to every spiritual person for the truth of this: and we call on every one, whatever be the mercies he has received, to express his sense of them in this way. Certainly they who have been delivered from the pains of child-birth, have abundant reason to present such offerings to God: and we do not hesitate to say, that their expressions of gratitude should be diversified and enlarged according to the opportunities and abilities that God has given them. We must not however limit the subject to this particular deliverance; for, whatever mercy God has vouchsafed unto us, we should endeavour to requite him according to the loving-kindness he has shewn us.]

Having thus considered the purification of the mother, let us direct our attention to,

II. The presentation of her Son—

Here is the same reference to the law, as before. We will state to you,

1. What connexion it had with Christ's presentation in the temple—

[Upon the destruction of the Egyptian first-born, whilst not one of the first-born, either of men or cattle, that belonged to Israel, died, God claimed the first-born of Israel, both of men and beasts, as his peculiar property^b; and required that the reason of his so doing should be transmitted carefully to the latest posterity^c. Afterwards he accepted the tribe of Levi and their cattle in the place of the first-born and their cattle^d; and appointed *them*, with very peculiar and impressive solemnities^e, to be consecrated to his service in their stead. He appointed also that the precise number of the persons belonging

^b Exod. xiii. 2.

^c Exod. xiii. 11—14.

^d Numb. iii. 11—13.

^e Numb. viii. 5—23.

to each should be ascertained; and it being found that the first-born were two hundred and seventy-three more in number than the Levites, he ordered that they should be redeemed at the price of five shekels a-piece, (about 12s. 6d. each,) and that the money should be paid to Aaron and his sons for the service of the tabernacle^f, and from that time it was an established law, that every male which opened the womb should be holy to the Lord^g; the clean *beasts* were to be sacrificed to him; and the unclean to be redeemed with a lamb: but the first-born of *men* were universally to be redeemed; his mercy to them, and his consequent property in them, being thus kept in everlasting remembrance^h.

Now Christ, as Mary's first-born, came under this law; and though his life had never been forfeited, yet, to fulfil the law, and cut off all occasion of offence, he must be redeemed in the same manner as others. For this purpose his parents carried him to the Temple, and presented him before the Lord, in the way that God had appointed.

But it may be asked, Did the blessed Virgin wish to exempt him from the peculiar service of her God? No: she knew that he was sent into the world to be his servant, and that his ear was bored to the door-post as soon as he assumed our natureⁱ: but she would omit nothing which the Law required, either at *her* hands or *his*: teaching us thereby to sink all personal concerns in a regard for the honour of our God, and the good of our fellow-creatures.]

2. What their compliance with the law in this instance may TEACH us—

[Loudly indeed does it speak to *mothers*. Behold the blessed Virgin taking her infant child “to present him to the Lord:” is not this the thing which you should do the very moment you embrace your new-born babe? Should you not do it every time that you administer to its necessities, or supply its wants? Methinks you should never draw out the breast to it, without lifting up your heart in prayer for it, and entreating God to accept and own it, as a child of his. How can any of you endure the thought of bringing forth for Satan, and nourishing a child for him? Surely your prayer should often be ‘Lord, I ask: not for my child the things of this world; (give him food and raiment, and I am content;) but I ask for grace; I ask for mercy; I ask for peace; I ask for all the blessings of salvation for him. I ask that thou thyself mayest be his

^f Numb. iii. 39—51.

^g Numb. xviii. 15, 16.

^h If *the whole* of the various passages cited upon this subject be not read, very large and copious extracts at least should be made, in order to lay the subject fully before the audience.

ⁱ Compare Ps. xl. 6. with Heb. x. 5.

portion, and that he may be the lot of thine inheritance. Yes, ye who have travailed in birth with your dear children, let your anxieties for them be summed up in this, that they may be "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." If you "travail in birth with them again and again till Christ be formed in them, so far from pitying your anguish, I will rejoice over you, and say, that "your labour shall not be in vain." Little do mothers consider how much, under God, the salvation of their children depends on them. Little do they think how the prayers they have offered *for*, and with, their children, and the tears they have shed for them, would impress their tender minds, long after *their* tongues have been silent in the grave: and probably induce a penitential sorrow, when some concurring providence shall have softened and prepared their minds. Were parents more anxious about the spiritual welfare of their children, we should not so often find them in their declining years bowed down with trouble, and "their grey hairs brought with sorrow to the grave."

And does not the Presentation of the infant Jesus in the Temple speak to *young people* also? Yes surely; and that too in most instructive terms. You are ready to think it too early yet awhile to give yourselves to the Lord: but can that ever be too early, which is your most indispensable duty, your highest privilege, your surest felicity? Did Samuel ever regret that he was given to the Lord even from his mother's womb? Did Timothy spend a less happy life, because he followed the faith and piety of Lois and Eunice? If you could but once taste the blessedness of true religion, you would never think of it as a toil, or dread it as a bondage: having "drunk water out of the wells of salvation," you would most contentedly leave to others the muddy draughts which they with difficulty collect from their own "broken cisterns." Be prevailed upon, then, to make the attempt; to give yourselves to the Lord; to commence that blessed course which Jesus trod before you. You have a special promise given you by God himself; "They that seek me early, shall find me:" The Lord impress it on your minds, and lead you to a sweet experience of its truth and blessedness!

But the subject speaks to *all* of us; yes, I say, to *all*. Do we not all profess to be "the Church of the *first-born*?" and is it not on that ground that we hope to be numbered with "the general assembly, who are written in heaven?" Behold then, we all belong to God: he lays claim to every one of us, and says, "They are mine." True, "we have been redeemed, yea redeemed, not with corruptible things as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." But wherefore have we been redeemed? That we might *not* serve the Lord? Nay; but

that we *might* serve him: "Christ has redeemed us, that he might purify us unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works." In the name of God then I say, "Ye are not your own; ye are bought with a price; therefore ye should glorify God with your bodies and your spirits, which are his." And here let me observe to you, that there is no commutation of service admitted or allowed. If all the tribes of the earth should offer to stand in your place, and to serve God in your stead, he would not regard their offer, nor dispense with your service. All of you must surrender up yourselves to him. You have already been devoted to him in baptism: remember then the vows that are upon you: Remember "whose you are, and whom you are bound to serve:" and know assuredly, that those words which are so often, but so ignorantly, uttered by us in our prayers, contain the very truth of God; "his service is perfect freedom."]

MCCCCLXXVI.

CHRIST THE CONSOLATION OF ISRAEL.

Luke ii. 25. *The same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel.*

IN every age of the Church, there have been some distinguished from the common herd of professors, by their unfeigned zeal and piety. At the time when our blessed Lord came into the world, the Jewish nation were in a most degenerate state: yet were there some, who, with humble and assured expectation, "looked for redemption in Jerusalem." Amongst those was that aged saint, "to whom it was revealed, that he should not see death, till he should have seen the Lord's Christ:" "the same man was just and devout," waiting for the sight of him whom he regarded as "the Consolation of Israel," and expecting it as the consummation of all his wishes.

The description here given of our Lord is worthy of peculiar attention; while the conduct of the holy patriarch is also replete with useful instruction. We propose therefore to consider,

I. In what respects Christ is "the Consolation of Israel"—

The Scriptures inform us, that there is consolation

in Christ^a, even abundant^b and everlasting consolation^c. Our Lord himself, speaking of the Spirit, calls him “another Comforter^d,” intimating thereby that he himself had sustained and executed this office. But as the Israel of God in that age were in some respects different from the Israel that now is, it will be proper to distinguish between them, and to shew in what respects this glorious title is applicable to Christ;

I. In reference to the Jewish Church—

[He came *to give them clearer light*. Moses had revealed to them the will of God: but he had put a veil upon his face to intimate the darkness of that dispensation^e; and had expressly referred them to a prophet who should arise after him, to whom they must look for fuller instructions^f. The prophets of later ages taught the people to look forward to the times of the Messiah, when the glorious light should arise upon the Church, to chase away all the clouds of darkness in which it was then involved^g; insomuch that at the time of Christ’s advent there was a general and assured expectation, that a fuller revelation was about to be given them by him: “We know that Messiah cometh, who is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things^h.”

He came also *to deliver them from the yoke of the ceremonial law*. This was a heavy burthen, which not even the most spiritual among them was able to support. This was never intended to continue any longer than the period fixed for the Messiah’s advent. It was foretold by David, that a priest should arise after the order of Melchizedec; and consequently, with the change of priesthood, there must be a change of the whole law that related to itⁱ. Other prophets spake of “a new covenant^k,” and of “a shaking again, not of the earth only, but also of the heavens^l :” by which they intimated that the old covenant should vanish away^m, and that the new order of things, which could not be shaken, should remain, after that the former was abrogated and dissolvedⁿ.

He came moreover *to establish an universal empire*. The Jews in general misunderstood the prophecies relating to this event, and supposed that their Messiah would erect a temporal monarchy: but those who had a clearer insight into the meaning

^a Phil. ii. 1.^b 2 Cor. i. 5.^c 2 Thess. ii. 16, 17.^d John xiv. 16.^e 2 Cor. iii. 13.^f Deut. xviii. 15.^g Isai. lx. 1—3. Mal. iv. 2.^h John iv. 25.ⁱ Heb. vii. 11, 12.^k Jer. xxxi. 31—34.^l Hagg. ii. 6.^m Heb. viii. 8.ⁿ Heb. xii. 25, 27.

of the prophets, expected the establishment of a spiritual kingdom, wherein they should not merely be “delivered from all their enemies, but should serve God without fear in righteousness and holiness before him all the days of their life^o.”

To those who viewed him as the appointed Source of these benefits, his advent must be an occasion of most exalted joy: and accordingly it was announced as such by the angelic hosts, who said, “Behold, we bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people; for unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord^p.”]

2. In reference to the Christian Church—

[Having partaken of all the preceding benefits, we are led to contemplate the Saviour more immediately in reference to our own necessities: and O, what a consolation is he to us, while we view him *as a Propitiation for our sins!* What tongue can utter the feelings of a contrite soul, when, after many fears of God’s wrath, it is enabled to see the efficacy of Christ’s atonement? O, the peace, the joy, the exultation that arise from every fresh application of his blood to the conscience! Well is “the peace said to pass understanding,” and “the joy of believing to be unspeakable and glorified!”

But we are enabled to view him further *as our “Advocate with the Father.”* In this light, he is, if possible, more precious than in the former. The comfort springing from his sacrifice would be greatly diminished, if we did not know that he is entered into heaven with his own blood, to plead the merit of it in our behalf. What should we do under any fresh contracted guilt, if we had not an Intercessor, through whom we might return to God, and offer our petitions with confidence of acceptance? Weak and frail as we are, we should sit down in despair: but having such a High-Priest that is passed into the heavens for us, we may come boldly to the throne of grace, assured of obtaining mercy, and of finding grace to help us in the time of need^q.

Further, we behold him also *as a fountain of all spiritual blessings.* “It hath pleased the Father that in Christ should all fulness dwell^r. Whatever we want, whether wisdom, or righteousness, or strength, there is a fulness of it all in him; and we may say, “In the Lord have I righteousness and strength^s.” What an unspeakable consolation must this be to those who feel their emptiness and poverty! What blessed confidence does it bring into the soul, when, under a full conviction that we have not in ourselves a sufficiency even to think a good thought^t, we are enabled to say, “I can do all things through Christ, who strengtheneth me^u!”

^o Luke i. 72—75. ^p Luke ii. 10, 11. ^q Heb. iv. 14, 16.

^r Col. i. 19. ^s Isai. xlv. 24. ^t 2 Cor. iii. 5. ^u Phil. iv. 13.

In these views “Christ is so precious to those who believe in him,” that they “account all things but loss and dung in comparison of the knowledge of him^x.”]

It will not be unprofitable to consider,

II. In what manner we are to “wait for” him—

In the precise sense in which this expression is used in the text, we can now only wait for his coming to judge the world. But there is a spiritual advent to the soul, which every believer is entitled to expect: for, as Christ said to his Disciples, “I will not leave you comfortless; *I will come unto you^y*; so he says to every obedient follower, “I will come unto you, and make my abode with you^z.” This advent therefore we are entitled to expect: and we should wait for it,

1. In a renunciation of all other comforters—

[The ungodly, in their troubles, go, like the Jews of old, to the creature for help and comfort^a: the worldling, to his business; the voluptuary, to his indulgences; the man of gaiety, to his sports; and the formalist, to his duties. They all “forsake the fountain of living waters, and hew out to themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water^b.” But we must go to Him, who invites the weary and heavy-laden, and gives them assurances of rest^c. The language of our hearts must be, “Lord, to whom shall we go^d? Whom have we in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that we desire besides thee^e.” “None else shall save us; for in thee, even in thee alone, the fatherless findeth mercy^f.”]

2. In a firm persuasion of his all-sufficiency—

[We shall in vain hope for comfort in Christ, if we doubt either his power or his willingness to save us. “If our faith be wavering, we shall receive nothing of the Lord^g.” We should not therefore come to Christ, saying, “Lord, if thou canst do any thing for us, interpose and help us^h;” but, “Lord, I know that with thee all things are possibleⁱ;” thy blood can cleanse from the deepest guilt^k; thy grace can vanquish the most deep-rooted lusts^l; and one glimpse of thy countenance can turn all my sorrows into joy^m. “Having thee, though possessed of nothing else, I possess all thingsⁿ.”

^x Phil. iii. 8.

^y John xiv. 18.

^z John xiv. 21—23.

^a Hos. v. 13.

^b Jer. ii. 13.

^c Matt. xi. 28.

^d John vi. 68.

^e Ps. lxxiii. 25.

^f Hos. xiv. 3.

^g Jam. i. 6, 7.

^h Mark ix. 22.

ⁱ Job xlii. 2.

^k 1 John i. 7. Isai. i. 18.

^l 2 Cor. xii. 9.

^m Ps. iv. 6. and xlii. 11.

ⁿ 2 Cor. vi. 10.

What a holy glorying would such views of Christ introduce into the soul, even if its distresses were ever so accumulated^o! Surely, our consolations should abound not only above, but also in proportion to, our heaviest afflictions^p.]

3. In an assured expectation of his promised advent—

[That he has promised to come to the souls of his afflicted people has been before shewn. Indeed a very principal end of his heavenly mission was, “to comfort them that mourn in Zion, and to appoint unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness^q.” Will he then relinquish the work he has undertaken? Will he violate his own engagements? “Is he a man, that he should lie, or the Son of Man, that he should repent?” Let us not then listen to the suggestions of unbelief and impatience^r: but rather obey the voice of the prophet, who says, “Though the vision tarry, wait for it; for in due time it shall come and shall not tarry^s.”]

Our IMPROVEMENT of this subject shall be,

1. In a way of inquiry—

[What do we make the ground of *our* consolation? We see what is supremely and exclusively the consolation of *Israel*. O that our regard to Christ may testify for us, that we belong to the true Israel!]

2. In a way of encouragement—

[Consolation implies some previous trouble. Now, trouble, if not of a temporal, yet certainly of a spiritual kind, we must all feel. Let us acquaint ourselves with Christ, and we shall never be at a loss for comfort. Let us live nigh to him, and we may defy all the powers of earth and hell.]

^o 2 Cor. xii. 10.

^p 2 Cor. i. 5.

^q Isai. lxi. 1—3.

^r Ps. lxxvii. 7—9.

^s Hab. ii. 3.

^t See Isai. xxv. 9.

MCCCCLXXVII.

TESTIMONY BORNE TO JESUS IN THE TEMPLE.

Luke ii. 28—32. *Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.*

WHILST we are noticing, as they arise, the various steps of our Saviour's humiliation, we shall have

repeated occasions to observe, how carefully God has guarded us against the unfavourable impressions which we might otherwise have received from them. At no season was the Divine interposition more remarkable than at our Saviour's birth. The circumstances that attended it were as humiliating as could well be conceived; for he was born in a stable, and laid in a manger. But the descent of angels from heaven to announce and celebrate his advent, was more than sufficient to counterbalance the effect, which the meanness of his appearance might produce. Thus it was also when he was presented to the Lord by his parents, at the time of his mother's purification in the temple. He was presented in order to be redeemed, as all other first-born children were; as though his life had been forfeited, as well as theirs. But, as a counterpoise to this, an aged saint, to whom it had been promised that he should not die till he had seen the Messiah, was warned by an express revelation from above to go into the temple for that purpose. Whilst he was there, the child was brought thither by his parents; and this holy man was inspired to distinguish his person, and to proclaim his character. His language on this occasion is very instructive: it shews us,

I. What views we should have of Christ—

We have no reason to think that in his outward appearance the infant Jesus was at all different from others. But this aged saint, on taking him up in his arms, announced him,

1. As the divinely-appointed Saviour—

[It was to God the Father that this holy man addressed his devout acknowledgments, and said, "Mine eyes have *seen* thy Salvation." We must never forget, that the Father is the fountain, from whence the streams of salvation flow. HE is "the giver of every good and perfect gift;" and the gift of his dear Son to a ruined world was altogether the fruit of his love. "HE prepared for him a body:" HE qualified him for his office by an immeasurable communication of the Holy Spirit. HE upheld him in the execution of his work, protected and preserved him till his hour was come, and enabled him to persevere till he could say, "It is finished."

Moreover the Father himself bore testimony to him under that character. Thrice, by an audible voice from heaven, did he point him out to the world in that view; “This is that my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: hear him.” He constrained angels (both good and bad), and men (enemies as well as friends), to unite their testimony with his. In raising up Jesus from the dead, he declared also with irresistible evidence, that Jesus was his Son; and that what he had done for the salvation of the world, was accepted in our behalf. The Apostles, whom he sent forth to instruct the world, were everywhere to bear this testimony, that the “Father had sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world:” and the Holy Ghost was poured out upon thousands, both in his gracious influences and miraculous powers, in order to confirm their word.

In a word, our blessed Lord himself always spake of himself as *sent* by the Father to perform *His* will; and therefore, whilst we thankfully acknowledge the readiness with which Jesus undertook our cause, we must always regard him as *God’s* salvation, *commissioned by him for that purpose, accepted by him in that capacity, and proclaimed by him for that end.*]

2. As the universal Saviour—

[The immediate and primary objects of the Messiah’s attention were, (as our Lord himself informs us,) “the lost sheep of the House of Israel^a.” And, after his resurrection, he gave especial commandment, that his Apostles, who were commissioned to preach the Gospel to all nations, should make the first offers of salvation to the Jews, even in that very city where he had so recently been condemned to death, and to that very people who had imbrued their hands in his blood^b. Accordingly we find that the Apostles forbore to preach unto the Gentiles, till the Jews had obstinately rejected their testimony, and poured contempt upon the proffered salvation^c.

But the ultimate design of God was to give salvation to the world at large. If the Jews were to have the peculiar glory of giving birth to the Saviour, and of having the Gospel first ministered to them, they were not to engross all the benefits of his mission. The Gentiles, who sat in darkness and the shadow of death, were to behold his light, and to be guided by him into the paths of peace. Wherever there is a fallen child of Adam, there is a person for whom Christ came into the world, and to whom the Gospel, if thankfully accepted, shall become the power of God unto salvation. *We* are of Gentile extraction, and to us are the blessings of salvation offered: nor should we ever name the name of Christ, without feeling our obligations to him, and glorying in him as “all our salvation and all our desire.”

^a Matt. xv. 24.

^b Luke xxiv. 47.

^c Acts xiii. 46.

These two points which we have noticed in the text, as distinguishing the character of the Saviour, are united by the prophet; who represents the Father as addressing his Son in these memorable terms: "It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant, to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel; I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be MY salvation *unto the ends of the earth*^d."]

That these views are not merely of a speculative nature, will be evident, whilst we notice,

II. The blessed effects of them upon a dying hour—

That the aged saint was *in a measure* affected, as Jacob was at the sight of his beloved Joseph^e, we may very well concede: but still there was a difference between the two cases, corresponding with the difference between the objects seen: the one was affected *as a parent*, at the sight of a long-lamented son; the other, *as a believer*, at the sight of him on whom all his hopes, and the hopes of a ruined world, were built. The fact is, that a sight of Christ *in his true character* has now, and at all times, the very same effect. The mere circumstance of beholding his bodily presence, or of taking him up into one's arms, would never reconcile one to the thoughts of death: but the beholding of him as the Author and Procurer of salvation, (as we may do by faith,) will universally,

1. Divest death of its terrors—

[That which makes death terrible, is sin. We know in our minds that sin is hateful unto God, and that he has denounced his heavy judgments against it: and consequently whilst that continues unrepented of, we cannot but feel a secret dread of God's tribunal, and of the sentence that shall be passed upon us. But, if we have "by faith seen him, who is invisible," if we have embraced in our hearts the Lord Jesus, and relied upon him as the appointed Saviour of the world, what have we to fear? "Our iniquity is forgiven, and our sin is covered:" by "believing in Jesus, we are justified from all things;" even "sins of a crimson dye are made white as snow." The sting of death therefore is drawn; and we may adopt the language of the Apostle, "The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law: but thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ^f!"

^d Isai. xlix. 6.

^e Gen. xlvi. 30.

^f 1 Cor. xv. 56, 57.

It is true, that many, who are ignorant of Christ, are enabled to brave death on a field of battle, and even to look forward to it with composure in its more gradual approaches. But in both cases they either put away the thought of God's judgment altogether, or deceive themselves with the idea that they are prepared to meet it. Let them only be undeceived respecting the state of their own souls, and the state to which alone the promises of salvation are attached, and the most stout-hearted man in the universe will tremble: and it is uniformly found, that those persons who most appear to disregard death, are most averse to hear of it, or to reflect on its consequences on the souls of men. It is the knowledge of Christ only that affords a Scriptural hope of acceptance with God; and therefore it is that alone which will enable us to view with comfort the approach of death.]

2. Make it an object of desire—

[St. Paul tells us that to whomsoever "it is Christ to live, it is also gain to die:" and he speaks of himself as "having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which he considered as far better" than the happiest state he could enjoy on earth. Would we know what it was that made death so desirable to him? he tells us; "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me." And in proportion as our views of Christ are clear, the same effects will follow: "We shall rejoice in hope of the glory of God." Who can hear that prayer of Christ's, "Father, I will that they whom thou hast given me may be with me, to behold that glory which thou hast given me;" who, I say, can hear this, and not long for its accomplishment? There may remain in us somewhat of a natural fear of dissolution; and a regard for our families may perhaps make us wish to prolong for a season our stay on earth: but when, like Stephen, we behold the Lord Jesus and the glories of the invisible world, we feel every other tie dissolved, and long to have "mortality swallowed up of life." We are like persons in a foreign land, who, after having formed many friendships there, are loth to quit it; but, feeling the stronger attractions of their own family and country, relinquish present comforts, in the hope and prospect of others more sublime. This is represented as the state of all who have made any progress in the divine life; they are "looking for, and hasting to, the coming of the day of Christ's." Some may enjoy more of triumph in their end, and others less; but the testimony of David is found almost universally true, "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace^b."]]

^a 2 Pet. iii. 12.

^b Ps. xxxvii. 37.

We may LEARN from hence,

1. In what manner we should approach God's temple *below*—

[It is particularly noticed respecting this distinguished saint, that "he came *by the Spirit* into the temple." Thus was his mind prepared for those manifestations of the Saviour which he there received. And what is the reason that we come up so often to the house of God without any benefit to our souls? Is it not that we come thither merely in a customary formal way, perhaps from no better motive than curiosity, and never pray to God for his Spirit to accompany us thither? We do not go up with enlarged expectations: we do not even think of having Christ revealed to our souls. But why do we not expect to see Christ there? Has he not said, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world?" And is not this the particular direction of God to his ministers, "Say ye to the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy salvation cometh!" Know then, brethren, that, though you cannot see Christ in the flesh, you may by faith obtain a far brighter view of him than that holy man enjoyed who embraced him in his arms: and if you would have such manifestations of him to your souls in the house of God, you must pray to God for his Spirit to accompany you to his house, and take away the veil from your hearts. "Be not straitened in yourselves, and you shall not be straitened in your God:" only come hungering and thirsting after Christ, and you shall never be "sent empty away."]

2. In what way we may secure admission into his temple *above*—

[There is one great preparation for an entrance into heaven, and that is, a sight of Christ by faith. "This is life eternal, to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." Without the knowledge of Christ no man can behold the face of God in peace. "There is no other foundation whereon any man can build," "nor any other name whereby any man can be saved." It was this which saved those who looked forward to him before his advent; and it is this which alone saves any since his advent. O that we duly considered this! How diligently should we then inquire, What are my views of Christ? How am I affected with them? Do they lead me to cast myself upon him? Do they enable me to rejoice in him? Do I under the influence of them look forward to the period of my dissolution as that which will introduce me to his more immediate presence, and to the consummation of all my hopes? Brethren, rest not in a mere

¹ Isai. lxii. 11.

nominal profession; be not content with calling Christ, Lord, Lord; but seek such views of him as shall transform you into his image, and make you meet for his glory.]

MCCCCLXXVIII.

THE ENDS AND EFFECTS OF CHRIST'S EXHIBITION TO THE WORLD.

Luke ii. 34, 35. *Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.*

THE ways of God are deep and unsearchable. The richest displays of his love have been often accompanied with the heaviest afflictions. The honour bestowed on Paul was the forerunner of great sufferings. Thus the Virgin's distinguished privilege of bringing the Son of God into the world was a prelude to the severest anguish to her soul. Even the gift of the Messiah himself, while it saves some, is the occasion of a more dreadful condemnation to others. It was foretold, that, as this was one end, so it would also be an effect, of Christ's mission.

I. The remote ends of Christ's exhibition to the world—

God has *on the whole* consulted his creatures' good as well as his own glory; but he will not effect the happiness of every individual.

The "*fall of many*" was one end of Christ's coming—

[His appearance was contrary to the carnal expectations of the Jews. Hence he became a stumbling-block to almost the whole nation. It had been plainly foretold that he should be so^a. This prophecy is frequently quoted by the inspired writers^b. Our Lord himself expressly refers to it^c. He elsewhere confirms the declaration contained in it^d.]

The coming of Christ actually produced this effect—

[Many took offence at him^e. Thus they became more

^a Isai. viii. 14, 15.

^b 1 Cor. i. 23. 1 Pet. ii. 8.

^c Matt. xxi. 42, 44.

^d John ix. 39.

^e At his low parentage, his mean appearance, his sublime doctrines, his high pretensions, &c.

wicked than they would otherwise have been^f. Thus also they perished with a more aggravated condemnation^g.]

But this was by no means the chief end.

The “*rising of many*” was another end of Christ’s coming—

[Jews and Gentiles were in a most deplorable condition: they were guilty, helpless, hopeless. From this state Christ came to raise them. This also was a subject of prophecy^h; and our Lord often declares that this was the end of his comingⁱ: hence he calls himself “the resurrection and the life^k.”]

And his coming produced this effect also—

[Few believed on him before his death: but myriads were raised by him soon after. They rose from a death in sin to a life of holiness. This effect is still carrying on in the world. Many from their own experience can say with Hannah^l—]

These ends, however, were more remote.

II. The more immediate end—

The minds of men in reference to God were very little known: neither ceremonial nor moral duties could fully discover their state; but he came to make it clear how every one was affected towards God.

In order to this he was “a mark or butt of contradiction^m”—

[No man ever met with so much contradiction as heⁿ. He was contradicted by all persons^o, on all occasions^p, in the most virulent manner^q, in spite of the clearest evidence^r, and in the most solemn seasons^s— — — This was frequently as a sword in Mary’s breast.]

By his becoming such a mark, the thoughts of men’s hearts were discovered—

[The Pharisees wished to be thought righteous; the Scribes, the free-thinkers of the day, pleaded for candour; the

^f John xv. 22.

^g Matt. xi. 22.

^h Isai. viii. 14.

ⁱ Luke xix. 10. John x. 10.

^k John xi. 25.

^l 1 Sam. ii. 8.

^m Σημείον ἀντιλεγόμενον.

ⁿ Heb. xii. 3.

^o Scribes, Pharisees, lawyers, Herodians.

^p In all that he *taught* about his person, work, and offices, and in all he *did*, in working miracles, &c.

^q They came to catch, ensnare, and provoke him.

^r They would rather ascribe his miracles to Beelzebub, and his doctrines to madness, impiety, and inspiration of the devil.

^s Even on the cross itself.

Herodians professed indifference for all religion: yet they all combined against Christ. Thus they shewed what was in their hearts.]

The preaching of Christ still makes the same discovery—

[Christ is still a butt of contradiction in the world. Before his Gospel is preached, all seem to be agreed; but when he is set forth, discord and division ensue^t: then the externally *righteous* people shew their enmity; then the *indifferent* discover the same readiness to persecute. On the other hand the humility of others appears: many publicans and harlots gladly embrace the truth, and many believers manifest a willingness to die for Christ.]

By way of IMPROVEMENT we may inquire,

1. What self-knowledge have we gained from the preaching of Christ?

[He has been often “set forth crucified before our eyes.” This must in a measure have revealed our thoughts to us. What discoveries then has it made^u? Let us take the Gospel as a light with which to search our hearts. Let us beg of God to illumine our minds by his Holy Spirit.]

2. What effect has the preaching of Christ produced on our lives?

[We must either rise or fall by means of the Gospel. Are we then risen with Christ to a new and heavenly life? or are we filled with prejudice against his Church and people? Let us tremble lest he prove a rock of offence to us. If we rise with him now to a life of holiness, he will raise us ere long to a life of glory.]

^t Matt. x. 34—36.

^u Has it shewn us our natural pride and self-righteousness, our self-sufficiency and self-dependence, our light thoughts of sin, our ingratitude, our unbelief, our enmity against God and his Christ? If it have not taught us these humiliating lessons, we have learned nothing yet to any good purpose.

MCCCCLXXIX.

CHRIST'S EARLY HABITS.

Luke ii. 49. *And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?*

THE prophets and apostles of old are proposed to us as examples in a variety of respects: but we are

to follow men no further than they themselves followed Christ. Christ is the great pattern, to which all are to be conformed: and so fully is his character delineated in the Holy Scriptures, that we can scarcely ever be at a loss to know either what he did, or what he would have done, in any circumstances of life. The account we have indeed of his early days is very concise. There is little related of him to gratify our curiosity, but enough to regulate our conduct. The only authentic record which we have of the transactions of his childhood, is that before us.

His parents had carried him up at twelve years of age to Jerusalem, where all the males were obliged to assemble thrice in the year. After the paschal solemnities were completed, his parents set out on their journey homeward, and proceeded for one whole day, concluding that Jesus was in the company together with them. In the evening, to their great surprise, they sought for him in vain among all his kinsfolk and acquaintance; and therefore they returned the next day with their hearts full of sorrow and anxiety to Jerusalem, to search for their beloved child: but there they could hear no tidings of him all that night. Prosecuting their inquiries the third day, they found him at last, conversing with the doctors in the temple. Joseph being only his reputed father, left the task of reproving him to Mary his mother. She, gently chiding him for the distress he had occasioned them, received from him the reply which we have just read; in which he vindicated his conduct, from the superior obligations which he owed to his heavenly Father, and shewed, that their anxieties had arisen from their own ignorance and unbelief. They, we are told, "understood not his saying:" but *we* understand it: and from a sense of the vast importance of it, we will,

I. Explain to you his reply—

[This was probably the first time that he had ever been at Jerusalem since he was quite an infant: and he was solicitous to improve to the uttermost the opportunity which this season had afforded him, of cultivating divine knowledge, and

“increasing in heavenly wisdom.” Not wearied with the seven days that he had spent in spiritual exercises, he was happy to prolong the time, and to sit among the doctors (not with dictatorial forwardness, but with the modesty of a child) to answer any questions that were put to him, and to ask for information on those points, in which he found himself not yet sufficiently instructed^a. It was in the use of such means as these that the indwelling Godhead gradually irradiated his mind, and trained him up for the office, which at a more advanced age he was to fulfil. This was “the business to which his heavenly Father had called him,” at this time; and it was the delight of his soul to execute it: nor was he responsible to his earthly parents for overlooking on this occasion that attention to their feelings, which, in less urgent circumstances, he would have gladly shewn.

For all this he appealed to them: “How is it that ye sought me with such anxiety? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business?” You know *whence I am*, that I am, in a way that no other child ever was, or ever will be, the Son of God. You know *the end for which I was sent into the world*, even to save my people from their sins. You know *what marvellous interpositions have been vouchsafed me*, inso-much that I was preserved, whilst all the children of Bethlehem, from two years old and under, were slain. You know also that the same heavenly Father who bade you carry me into Egypt, advertised you afterwards of Herod’s death, and directed you to return with me to our native land. And can you doubt that a child so born, and born for so great an end, and so miraculously preserved, shall be taken care of? Was not my heavenly Father’s care sufficient without yours?

Again, You have known *my habits from my earliest infancy*, and how entirely I have been devoted to my God, whilst in no single instance did I ever shew myself forgetful of you. You might well have concluded therefore, that I acted under the special direction of my heavenly Father, and might have been assured in your minds, that I was engaged “in my Father’s business.” You had abundant reason to be satisfied of all this; and therefore, though I cannot disapprove of your returning to search for me, I cannot altogether commend your sorrows and anxieties respecting me; since, if you had duly considered the circumstances I have referred to, your minds would have been comforted, being stayed on God.

Now, though “his parents understood not this at the time,” we, who enjoy a fuller revelation of God’s will, clearly comprehend it; and therefore may well, like Mary, treasure it up in our hearts. And being further informed, that during the

^a ver. 41—47.

whole of his youthful days "he was subject to his parents," we see, that the construction we have put upon his words is true, and our vindication of his conduct is correct.]

Having explained his words, let me now,

II. Commend to your attention the sentiments contained in them—

Two things are here evidently insinuated;

1. That the service of God is of paramount obligation—

[God's claims are infinitely superior to all that man can assert. We are to love and serve *him* with all our heart and soul and strength. In matters of mere arbitrary institution, he is pleased indeed to wave his claims, and to give a priority to ours; saying, "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice^b:" but in the service of the heart and of the soul, he will never for a moment abandon his rights: He says, "My Son, give *me* thine heart:" and this we must give him at the peril of our souls. In comparison of him, "our earthly parents, yea and our very life itself, are to be objects of hatred" and contempt^c. We are not to regard the authority of any superiors whatever, but to say, "whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye^d. Nor are we to be influenced by any examples, however numerous; but like Joshua, we must say, "Whatever the whole nation may do, I and my house will serve the Lord^e." This is strongly inculcated under the Christian dispensation: "Give thyself wholly to these things^f." "Rejoice *evermore*: pray *without ceasing*: in *every thing* give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you^g." In a word, our whole life should be such, as, if any one shall inquire after us, to leave no doubt upon his mind, but that we are dutifully and diligently engaged "in our Father's business." It is not necessary that we should be always *praying*: our Lord himself was not *praying* at this time, but gaining instruction in the things of God. This was *his* duty. *Ours* is to perform the various offices of life in their season, combining in their due measure the services which our station in life calls for, with those which we owe more immediately to God. But in all that we do, we must have respect to God's authority as appointing it, and seek God's glory in the execution of it. "We must live not unto ourselves, but solely and entirely unto God^h."]]

^b Hos. vi. 6.

^c Luke xiv. 26.

^d Acts iv. 19.

^e Josh. xxiv. 15.

^f 1 Tim. iv. 15. See the force of the Greek.

^g 1 Thess. v. 16—18.

^h Rom. xiv. 7, 8.

2. That in serving him, it is not possible for us to engage too early, or too earnestly—

[Our Lord was only twelve years of age at this time: and now, after having fulfilled all his duties during the seven days of the feast, he persisted even till the tenth day in prosecuting what he judged to be for the improvement of his own mind, and for the honour of his heavenly Father. It is probable that, whilst all the males of Israel were at Jerusalem together, he, a little child, could not gain the attention of the great doctors at Jerusalem, who would almost of necessity be fully occupied with those who had come from every quarter of the land. But when the strangers were all gone, he might without difficulty gain access to the great and authorized instructors of the Lord's people. This probably was one reason of his staying at that time, that so he might improve to the uttermost the only opportunity that had ever been afforded him. In like manner, when, in the course of his ministry, he had been labouring all the day, and praying all the night, and then, without taking any sustenance, was labouring also the next day, his friends sought him, fearing "he was beside himself" (as we translate it), or rather, that "he was transported too far," so as irreparably to destroy his own health¹. Now in all this he has shewn us, that, however we may be wearied *in* the Lord's service, we are never to be weary of it; but are to prosecute it incessantly to the very utmost of our power. In short, whatever progress we may have made in our divine course, we are to "forget the things which are behind, and to reach forth to those that are before," and never to pause till we have gained the prize^k.]

ADDRESS—

1. To parents—

[You have a solicitude for your children's welfare: you are anxious for the preservation of their health, and the advancement of their temporal prosperity. These feelings, if kept within due bounds, I by no means condemn. But your chief anxiety should be for the welfare of their souls; and your labour should be to engage them thoroughly in the business assigned them by their heavenly Father. If you neglect this, or shew a lukewarmness about it, you will involve yourselves in guilt of the deepest die. You remember how Eli was punished for this sin¹: and his sons Hophni and Phinchas will reproach him in the last day as accessory to their destruction. Beware lest that reproach be vented against you by your children: for assuredly, if your souls will be required at the hand

¹ Mark iii. 21. ὅτι ἐξέστη.

^k Phil. iii. 13, 14.

¹ 1 Sam. iii. 11—13.

of your minister, much more will the blood of your children be required at your hands^m.]

2. To young people—

[You have from the moment you came into the world a business assigned you by your heavenly parent, and you are bound to execute it from the very beginning according to your capacity. If you commence it early, you have a special promise from God, that you shall succeed in your effortsⁿ. And tell me, what period of life is there, in which you can be so well employed as in doing your Father's will? You may think that youth and manhood are seasons rather for pleasure and for temporal pursuits: but the more you resemble Christ, the happier you will be. Who is there amongst you that does not congratulate Samuel, Obadiah, Timothy, on their early surrender of themselves to God. Be assured, that such a retrospect in your own case will, in a dying hour, be a source of much comfort to your souls. In the meantime you will greatly honour God by dedicating your whole lives to him, and will diffuse blessings through the world, instead of being, as alas! too many are, curses to all around them. And thus, it may be hoped, you will conciliate the favour both of God and man^o. But if unhappily you be blamed for consecrating yourselves to God, then must you be ready to give a reason of your conduct with meekness and fear^p."]

^m Ezek. xxxiii. 8.

^o ver. 52.

ⁿ Prov. viii. 17.

^p 1 Pet. iii. 15.

MCCCCLXXX.

MINISTRY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST.

Luke iii. 4—6. *It is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.*

THERE is an abruptness in the language of the prophets, which, though it sometimes casts an obscurity over their writings, often gives them very peculiar force and energy. This may be noticed particularly in the passage referred to in our text. At the beginning of the fortieth chapter of his prophecies, Isaiah, without any particular intimation of it breaks

forth into a distinct subject, which from that time occupies his chief attention. He has indeed in the preceding chapters occasionally spoken of the Redeemer's kingdom: but from the beginning of this chapter he almost loses sight of the deliverance from Babylon, and dwells, even in the primary sense of his words, on the more important deliverance of men from their bondage to sin and Satan. He informs us^a that God had commissioned him to comfort his drooping people with assured prospects of his returning favour through the intervention of the Messiah. Then, passing over eight hundred years as scarcely more than a single day, he seems to himself to hear the very voice of Christ's forerunner, and to see *him* occupied in preparing the Messiah's way: and then, with a confident expectation that God's word should stand, he predicts the ultimate and universal establishment of the Messiah's kingdom.

The passage is quoted by St. Luke as actually fulfilled in the preaching of John the Baptist; and it may well be considered as of peculiar importance, since it is quoted by all the Four Evangelists. In considering it, we shall be led to shew,

I. What are the chief obstructions to our Redeemer's kingdom—

Some there were peculiar to the apostolic age—

[*The Jews* were so attached to Moses and their law, that they could not endure any thing which appeared to weaken their authority, and to transfer the people's regard to any other teacher. Knowing that their religion was from God, and not aware that it was intended only to be of temporary duration, they accounted it the vilest blasphemy to speak of the ministry of the one, or the authority of the other, being superseded.

They had also very erroneous notions of the Messiah's kingdom: they supposed he would be a great temporal prince, who would deliver them from the Roman yoke, and raise their nation to the highest pinnacle of human grandeur. Hence they were quite indignant that a poor despised Nazarene, who had not a place where to lay his head, should pretend to call himself their Messiah.

These prejudices greatly obstructed the establishment of

^a ver. 1, 2.

Christ's kingdom among them, and proved an almost insurmountable bar to their conversion.

Nor were *the Gentiles* in a state more favourable than the Jews. They were addicted to the vilest lusts, the grossest superstition, the most confirmed idolatry. The more learned among them were still further from the kingdom of God, and more hostile to it, on account of their philosophic pride, which led them to reject every thing which did not savour of human wisdom, and the Gospel especially, which appeared to them so repugnant to it. To be saved by a man who was crucified, and therefore apparently unable to save himself, was in their eyes a most flagrant absurdity.

Thus St. Paul informs us, that "the preaching of the cross was to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness."]

But there are others, which are common to all ages—

[It is not needful to distinguish between the different parts of the imagery, whereby these obstructions are described; else we might see in the elations of pride, the stubbornness of passion, and the gloominess of despondency, a correspondence between the terms that are used, and the obstacles that are depicted. Certain it is, without intending to refine upon the text, that these are the most common impediments to the establishment of the Messiah's kingdom.

Men will not endure to be told that they are justly obnoxious to the wrath of God, and utterly incapable of saving themselves; and that all, the best as much as the worst, must be indebted to the Lord Jesus Christ for all their hope and all their salvation. *The pride of the human heart* rises against this, and turns from it with disgust. *The lusts and passions of men* also are averse to the dominion of Christ: they hate controul: they will not submit to the restraints of the Gospel: to have them mortified, is like the plucking out of a right eye, or the cutting off of a right hand: the spiritual, as well as the fleshly, filthiness that is in us, pleads for indulgence: and every disposition of the mind, as well as every appetite of the body, sets itself against the authority of Christ, and rejects his yoke.

But besides these, which are the more obvious impediments to the Gospel, there are some others, which, though little noticed, are both powerful and common. There is in most men a tendency to despair. Whilst the unbelief of some leads them to despise the Gospel as an idle tale, in others, it operates to keep them back from embracing it, under an idea, that they never can be brought to the state that it requires. Either their guilt appears too great to be forgiven, or their lusts too strong to be subdued, or their circumstances so peculiar, as not to admit of so great a change in all the habits of their life.

These are obstacles which we all feel in a greater or less degree; and which must be removed, before Christ can enter freely into our hearts.]

That a view of these things may not discourage us, let us consider,

II. How they are to be removed—

As there were some peculiar obstacles in the apostolic age, so were there also peculiar circumstances calculated to remove them—

[*The general expectation of the Messiah*, which prevailed about the time of his coming, certainly tended to prepare his way. *The preaching of John the Baptist*, who with holy firmness laid his axe to the root of Pharisaic pride and hypocrisy, awakened a great and general attention to religion^a, insomuch that many doubted whether he were not the Messiah himself. *The ministry of Christ* also produced a general sensation through the Jewish land: the holiness of his life, the wisdom and authority of his words, and the number and beneficence of his miracles, wrought conviction upon the minds of thousands, and drove his enemies to the necessity of putting him to death, or of leaving him in the uncontrolled possession of universal influence. *The ministry of the Apostles*, confirmed as it was by the descent of the Holy Ghost, by the gift of tongues, and by miracles unnumbered, had yet greater effect: it bore down all opposition, and triumphed over the united powers of earth and hell. *The universal extension of the Roman empire* contributed also not a little to the facilitating of the establishment of the Redeemer's kingdom; since it gave to the Apostles an easy communication both with Jews and Gentiles throughout the world, in almost every part of which the Jewish Scriptures had already prepared their way.]

But it is of more practical importance to shew how *our* difficulties are to be removed—

[As these are the same in every age, so the means of removing them are such as are open to the use of all. We need notice only two; and these are, *repentance* and *faith*. *Repentance* is the great leveller of all obstructions: it “humbles the loftiness of man,” and “brings into captivity every thought that exalts itself against the knowledge of Christ.” Wherever real penitence exists, it brings the soul into the dust before God. No longer is the Gospel deemed unnecessary or severe: the penitent sees, that without it he must inevitably perish. Whether he have been more or less moral, he is equally

^a Matt. iii. 5, 6.

disposed to smite on his breast and cry for mercy. His vain conceits of his own goodness all vanish; and, instead of despising others as inferior to him in sanctity, he accounts himself rather "the chief of sinners." And it deserves particular attention, that the Baptist himself prescribed this as the very first and principal means of smoothing the way for the reception of Christ^c.

The next means, and that which renders the other effectual, is *faith*. This, no less than repentance itself, is an universal leveller. If repentance brings down the hills and mountains, faith exalts the valleys, straightens the crooked paths, and smooths the rough. Wonderful indeed is the efficacy of humble faith: it dissipates at once all desponding fears: the things which appeared utterly insurmountable, now become plain and easy: the blood of Christ is acknowledged as sufficient to cleanse them from all sin; and the grace of Christ as sufficient to make them victorious over every enemy. It is remarkable that our blessed Lord, on his first entrance on his ministry, united this with repentance, as the grand, the effectual expedient for establishing his kingdom in the world^d. And his Apostles after him continued to further his interests in the very same way: they preached everywhere "repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ."

To stir us up to that exertion which is necessary, let us contemplate,

III. The blessed consequences of their removal—

The manifestation of Christ's glory is that which ever did, and ever shall, follow the removal of those things which have hitherto veiled him in obscurity.

See how it was on his first appearance—

[The clouds which surrounded him, concealed in a measure the bright effulgence of his rays: his humble birth, his mean appearance, the contempt and abhorrence in which he was held, all tended to cast a veil over his divine majesty: yet even then his own more immediate Disciples "beheld his glory, as the glory of the only-begotten of the Father."]

See it more particularly after the day of Pentecost—

[Till that time his very Apostles saw but very imperfectly the nature of that kingdom which Christ came to establish: but when the Holy Ghost had opened their eyes, and had sealed their testimony on the hearts of others, what a splendour beamed from the countenance of our incarnate God! Then it was seen, that he who had been "crucified, was the Lord of glory," the brightness of the Father's glory, and the "express

^c ver. 3.

^d Mark i. 15.

image of his person." Every eye looked to him: every heart trusted in him: every soul "received out of his fulness grace for grace." He was that object which, if I may so speak, was the centre and circumference of the globe: in him all united; and beyond him none aspired. "In him the whole body of believers, collectively and individually, were complete."]

See it at this hour—

[Who is loved? who is honoured? who is served? who is glorified, wherever the Gospel prevails? who, but that adorable Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ? Those who once saw "no beauty or comeliness in him for which he was to be desired," now behold him as "fairer than ten thousand, and altogether lovely." "He is truly precious" to their souls; and to call him "their Friend and their Beloved," is the highest object of their ambition, or, rather, the only thing about which they have any material concern. It is the same in every quarter of the world: it is the same amongst high and low, rich and poor, learned and unlearned: if "God have shined into their heart to give them the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ," they "determine to know nothing else," to "glory in nothing else:" "this is all their salvation, and all their desire."]

But who can tell what it shall be in the latter days?

[The text informs us, that "all flesh shall see the salvation of God." Hitherto, notwithstanding all the efforts that have been used to spread the Gospel, darkness very generally prevails, and the obstacles to the Redeemer's kingdom are but partially removed. But the day is near at hand, when "all nations shall serve him," and "all people shall know him from the least of them to the greatest." Yes, "the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it;" and therefore it shall assuredly come to pass. Obstructions there are, no doubt, both great and numerous: but "before Zerubbabel the mountains shall become a plain." The extension of vital Christianity through the world is not more incredible than the establishment which it has already gained in the earth; especially when we consider, that, what has been already done, is, under God, the work of a few unlettered fishermen. O that that day may appear! O that God would "hasten it in his time!"]

CONCLUSION—

[As "a voice crying in this our wilderness," I would now say to you, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord." He has entered into the world: he has established his kingdom among men; he now "stands and knocks at the door of your hearts," and desires admission into them. O think what is it that obstructs his entrance into your hearts? Is it a proud conceit of your

own goodness? Let this mountain be brought low, comparing your lives with the demands of God's holy law. Is it an inveterate love of sin, and of this present world? let it give way to penitence and faith, that your path may be plain and smooth. Is it a doubt of the practicability of your salvation? Rely on Christ: "all things are possible to him that believeth."

Perhaps you will say, that "a preparation of heart must be from the Lord:" true; but it must be sought by you in the daily exercise of meditation and prayer. If you need any incentive to these duties, do but reflect upon the benefits resulting from them: think of a revelation of Christ to your soul! think of his glory exhibited to the eyes of your mind, and shining with increasing brightness to the perfect day! think too in how little a time you will "see him as he is," and "be with him for ever!" Dearly beloved, beg of God to "take the stumbling-blocks out of your way:" he is the same gracious God as ever he was; and if you cry unto him "he will make an high-way for you, like as he did for Israel in the day that he brought them out of the land of Egypt^e;" he "will make darkness light before you, and crooked things straight: these things will he do unto you, and not forsake you^f."]]

^e Isai. xi. 16.

^f Isai. xlii. 16.

MCCCCLXXXI.

LIBERALITY TO THE POOR.

Luke iii. 10, 11. *And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then? He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise.*

IN order to understand the true meaning of any part of Scripture, the strictest attention must be paid to the context. If this rule be not observed, there is scarcely any thing which may not be sanctioned by the inspired volume; and the most contradictory positions may appear to stand on equal authority. Suppose, for instance, the question in our text be taken, as other apparently similar questions must be taken, namely, as an inquiry into the way of salvation; we shall make John the Baptist return an answer directly contrary to the whole tenour of the Gospel. When the gaoler asked Paul and Silas, "What he must do to be saved?" they answered,

“Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved^a.” *This is the only true answer that can be given to that question*; for “there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we can be saved,” but the name of Jesus Christ^b. But if we look into the context, we find that John the Baptist had been “preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins^c;” or, in other words, had been preaching salvation by Jesus Christ, exactly as the Apostle Peter, and indeed all the Apostles, did on the day of Pentecost^d. Then, seeing multitudes coming to him for baptism, and apprehending that the great majority of them were taking up a profession of religion upon very light and erroneous grounds, he cautioned them strongly against a presumptuous confidence on the one hand, or an unproductive and hypocritical profession on the other; and exhorted them, if they would not experience the fate of a barren tree, to “bring forth fruits worthy of repentance^e.” In reply to this, the people ask, “What shall we *do*?” That is, *What fruits shall we bring forth*, in order to evince our sincerity^f? And the direction which John gives them, is an answer exactly suited to the occasion: it is to this effect; ‘If you would approve yourselves sincere and upright in your profession of faith in the promised Messiah, shew forth your faith by your works, and, above all, by an abounding exercise of love.’

Having thus prepared our way by a view of the context, and having ascertained what the Baptist’s design was in giving the people the direction in our text, we shall proceed to the more distinct consideration of his answer, and shall open to you,

I. Its import—

It is manifest that the direction given by him is figurative, and therefore not to be taken in its strict and literal sense. But we must not therefore imagine,

^a Acts xvi. 30, 31.

^b Acts iv. 12.

^c ver. 3.

^d See the people’s inquiry, and Peter’s answer, Acts ii. 37, 38.

^e ver. 7—9.

^f See the Greek, ver. 8—10. This will remove all doubt: for they adopt *the very same term as John had used*.

that we are at liberty to disregard it, as though it had no force at all. There can be no doubt but that the Baptist intended to inculcate a very tender compassion towards our indigent fellow-creatures, and a very enlarged exercise of liberality for their relief. To obtain, with as much precision as the subject is capable of, the true import of his words, we shall adduce from other parts of Scripture, but especially from the writings of the same Evangelist,

1. Some other passages of similar tendency—

[First, we shall notice one or two that are also figurative^g — — — There can be no doubt but that these require a very high degree of liberality to the poor, since they were actually practised *in their strictest sense* by the first Christians^h — — — From these we may turn to others that are more plainⁱ — — — What an accumulation of words is there in the former of these passages to encourage our compliance with the precept; and what a gracious benediction in the latter! — — — *To the rich* there is an especial charge given to be bountiful^k; but it is not to them only that this duty belongs; but to those also who gain a daily subsistence by their manual labour^l. To all, according to their ability, it equally appertains; for, on the foresight of a dearth in Judæa, all the disciples of Antioch, every one according to his ability, contributed instantly to their relief^m.]

2. Some examples which are set forth for our imitation—

[That of Zaccheus is particularly to our purpose, because he was just converted to the faith of Christ, and because our blessed Lord himself acknowledged this heavenly disposition to be an evidence of his having actually obtained acceptance with his Godⁿ — — — But the example of the Macedonian Churches is yet more pertinent; because it is an example, not of an individual, but of whole Churches; and those, not in a state of ease and opulence, but of great affliction and deep poverty; and because it is expressly set forth for the imitation of others, who are called upon to imitate it, *in order to prove the sincerity of their love to Christ*^o. By carefully comparing these several passages, we see clearly what our duty is:

^g Luke xii. 33, 34. and xiv. 12—14.

^h Acts ii. 44, 45. and iv. 32—37.

^k 1 Tim. vi. 18, 19.

^m Acts xi. 28—30.

^o 2 Cor. viii. 1—4, 8, 9.

ⁱ Luke vi. 38. and xi. 41.

^l Eph. iv. 28.

ⁿ Luke xix. 8, 9.

we are not required to burthen ourselves in order to ease others, but so to participate their burthens that they may partake of our ease^p: thus to “bear one another’s burthens is eminently to fulfil the law of Christ^q.”]

Having thus marked the import of the injunction in our text, we proceed to shew,

II. Its reasonableness—

The whole of God’s “law is good,” and the service it requires is reasonable. But the duty enjoined in our text, though arduous to a selfish mind, is particularly reasonable. For consider,

1. What obligations we owe to God for the superior comforts which we enjoy—

[It is God who assigns to all their lot, not only in respect to the situation in which they are born^r, but in all the changes, whether prosperous or adverse, which they experience through life^s. Whatever therefore we have above others, “it is God alone who has made us to differ^t.” And how eminently is this the case with respect to the ravages of war which during these last twenty years have desolated almost the whole of Europe, but have never reached our happy land! Compare our state with that of a great part of Germany at this present moment^u, and then say, whether a compassionate regard for our suffering fellow-creatures be not called for at our hands, and whether such an expression of it as our text requires, be at all unreasonable? Methinks, it is not possible to have even the most indistinct view of our obligations to God, without saying from our hearts, “What shall I render unto the Lord for all the benefits that he hath done unto me?”]

2. What we ourselves should desire, if we were reduced to the state in which myriads of our fellow-creatures now are—

[It is not easy to place ourselves in the situation of persons of whom we hear only by report: but yet we may conceive what we ourselves should desire, and what we should think reasonable, if we were perishing with cold and nakedness and hunger, whilst others, embarked in the same cause with ourselves, were exempt from those sufferings, and were enjoying comparative ease and affluence. Should we not wish them to

^p 2 Cor. viii. 13, 14.

^q Gal. vi. 2.

^r Acts xvii. 26, 28.

^s 1 Sam. ii. 6, 7.

^t 1 Cor. iv. 7.

^u This Sermon was preached in 1814, on occasion of a collection for the relief of the most grievous distresses in Germany.

stand forth for our relief? Should we not think it reasonable, that their exertions should rise in proportion to our necessities, and that they should almost literally fulfil the precept in our text, the man who had two coats imparting to us who had none, and that he who had meat should do likewise? Let us adopt for our principle the golden rule, and “Do unto others, as we would they should do unto us.”]

3. What our blessed Lord and Saviour has done for us—

[This is the consideration which St. Paul himself suggests in reference to this very point^x. O consider, “how rich he was” in the possession of his Father’s glory; and how “poor he became,” “not having so much as a place where to lay his head,” but dying under the curse that was due to our sins. Consider too what his object was; namely, that we, who deserved to be in hell without a drop of water to cool our tongues, might through his poverty be rich, and possess all the glory of heaven. Does such love as this require no return? When this very Saviour tells us, that what we do unto the least of his brethren, he accepts as done to himself, shall we think any requisition hard, or any sacrifice too great? Truly, not only our property, but even our life itself, may well be sacrificed for him^y; and we should account ourselves happy in proportion as we have an opportunity to advance his glory in the world.]

But instead of dwelling any longer on the general reasonableness of this precept, we will proceed to notice,

III. Its suitableness to the present occasion—

[Rarely, if ever, has greater occasion for charitable exertions existed than at present^z — — — Now therefore we might justly call upon you to comply with our text almost in the literal sense. But, waving that, we must urge you to adopt the *principle* that is there inculcated — — — and to bear in mind, that “he who soweth sparingly, shall reap also sparingly, and he who soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Let every man do according as he is disposed in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loveth a cheerful giver^a.” Do not however forget the important distinctions with which we began the subject. It is to glorify Christ, and to shew the sincerity of your love to him, that we invite you;—not to purchase heaven by your alms. Bear that in mind; and God will not forget it in the day of judgment.]

^x 2 Cor. viii. 9.

^y 1 John iii. 16. Acts xxi. 13.

^z Here the particular occasion should be opened at considerable length.

^a 2 Cor. ix. 6, 7.

MCCCCLXXXII.

PRACTICAL DUTIES ENFORCED.

Luke iii. 10—14. *And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then? He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise. Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you. And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages.*

WHATEVER want of human learning men may feel, they are, for the most part, well satisfied with their attainments in religious knowledge. If they are conscious of some faults, they do not suspect any want of just information, but only a defect in practising what they already know. But when persons begin to see their guilt and danger, they find that they need to be instructed in the very first principles of religion; and they are glad to make inquiries, which formerly they would have utterly disdained. This was the effect produced by the ministry of John the Baptist. The Scribes and Pharisees, being filled with self-conceit, rejected his word, and represented him as no better than a demoniac: but multitudes of others came to him with great solicitude, not to obtain answers to any speculative questions, but to ask, What they must do, to escape the wrath which he had so forcibly set before them.

We shall find it profitable to consider,

I. His answers to their inquiries—

Those who successively applied to him, and to whom he gave his answers, were,

1. The people—

[As these must of necessity comprehend a great variety of characters, the Baptist gave his answer generally, so as to strike at the characteristic evil of our fallen nature, selfishness. The natural man lives neither for God nor for his fellow-creatures, but for himself alone. If he has great superfluities, he

may without any difficulty give something to the poor and indigent: but if he has little more than bare necessities, he feels little, if any, responsibility for the use of them, and is chiefly occupied in making them subservient to his own comfort. From this selfish disposition innumerable evils proceed: indeed, it lies at the root of almost all evil. Hence the Baptist set himself in the first place to counteract it; and recommend in its stead the universal exercise of liberality and compassion.

That the Baptist's injunction should be taken according to the strict letter, we do not say: but, to give it any sense at all, it must imply far more than is commonly practised, or generally supposed to be our duty. The least it can mean is, that we should consider ourselves as stewards of all that we possess, and dispose of it conscientiously for the honour of God and the benefit of our fellow-creatures.]

2. The Publicans—

[The publicans were persons appointed under the authority of the Roman government to collect the taxes; and so odious was the office among the Jews, that few who had any regard for their own characters, would undertake it. Hence it was executed very generally in an unjust and oppressive manner; insomuch that the office, which was at first hated only on account of its evincing the subjection of the Jews to a foreign yoke, became proverbially infamous on account of the conduct of those on whom it was conferred.

Among the candidates for baptism were some of these: and they likewise inquired, what they should do. Now it is worthy of observation, that John did not recommend them to give up their office, notwithstanding the difficulties and temptations that attended the execution of it; but only to guard against the evils that were commonly practised in the discharge of it. The greater the temptations to which they were exposed, the more desirable it was that the office should be filled by persons who were truly conscientious; and the more honour such persons would do to religion, by maintaining an unblemished character in such a post. His advice therefore to them was, to exact nothing beyond what they were authorized to demand, but to regulate their whole conduct agreeably to the laws of justice and equity.

This injunction however need not to be confined to them: it is equally applicable to all persons possessed of official authority, and indeed to all persons, whose interest might lead them in a way of trade or business to impose on others for their own advantage^a.]

^a The duties of *Custom-house officers* might here be profitably insisted on, especially in places where several might be supposed to be present. But when pastoral fidelity leads us to make observations

3. The soldiers—

[The grace of God, which nothing can withstand, had reached the hearts of some of these: and they too made similar inquiries. To them also did the Baptist make a similar reply. Unfavourable as the life of a soldier is to the cultivation of piety, he did not tell them to get their discharge, but cautioned them against the evils incident to their profession. From their very education and mode of life, they are apt to disregard the feelings of men, and to injure or insult those who do not immediately comply with their wishes. In that age and country, it was also common for them to turn informers, that by false accusation they might share the fines that might be levied, or obtain bribes for exercising a pretended forbearance. Discontent and mutiny too were evils to which they were in general prone.]

Against all of these practices the Baptist warned them. He testified that all such things were evil, and that every person must abstain from them, if he would avoid the wrath which hangs over the head of every impenitent transgressor.

But neither should these cautions be limited to those who made the inquiry, nor to persons engaged in the military life: for the duties of peacefulness, equity, and contentment are applicable to every situation, and every age — — —]

That these answers may appear in their proper light, we shall proceed to shew,

II. The suitability of them to the occasion—

Certainly at first sight they appear defective, not to say, erroneous: for it never can be admitted for one moment that the correcting of those habits would procure everlasting salvation: such a reformation could make no atonement for their past sins, nor could it in any way supersede the necessity of believing in Christ. To understand the matter aright, we must consider what the import of their inquiries was, and what was the Baptist's more immediate office. John had told them all to "bring forth, (the word means, *do*,) to *do* fruits meet for repentance." They immediately inquire, each for himself, what are the particular things which they must *do*^b; that is, what they must *do* to evince the sincerity of their repent-

which may be considered as *personal*, we should be careful to make them with the utmost delicacy and tenderness.

^b ποιήσατε καρπὸνς—τί ποιήσαμεν.

ance? *This* is the question to which all his answers were directed. If it be thought that he should have begun to “preach Christ unto them,” I answer, This was not his office, at least, not in the plain specific way in which the Apostles preached Christ on the day of Pentecost: he was rather “to *prepare the way of the Lord* ;” and therefore he “preached only the baptism of *repentance*.” Bearing these things in mind, his answer will be found precisely suited to the occasion. They were calculated to impress upon their minds the following truths:

1. Evil habits are an obstacle to the reception of the Gospel—

[Who does not see that the indulgence of their respective sins was calculated to blind their eyes and harden their hearts? Are persons, at the very time that they are addicted to the grossest immoralities, in a state fit to receive instructions in the sublime doctrines of the Gospel? Must not every word of it appear “foolishness unto them?” What was the effect produced on the worldly-minded Pharisees, when our Lord spoke of “making to ourselves friends of the unrighteous mammon?” We are told, “the Pharisees, *who were covetous*, heard all these things; and they *derided* him^d.” And does not daily experience shew, that there must be a certain preparation of mind for the due reception of truth? If you cast the best seed that can be procured into land not broken up, but overgrown with briars and thorns, will you expect a harvest? So, if persons be not sufficiently convinced of the evil of their ways as to be willing to reform them in matters which unenlightened reason would condemn, there can be no hope that they will improve aright the sublimer truths of revelation.

The Baptist’s answer then was precisely what you would give to a man who by continued drunkenness had brought on a fever: ‘I can recommend you to a physician, whose prescriptions will infallibly cure you; but it is in vain to go to him, if you do not determine to put away your habits of intoxication.’]

2. The putting away of besetting sins is an indispensable evidence of our sincerity—

[The people professed to be penitent, and asked what they must do to prove it. Now can any one imagine that they could be sincere, if they were not willing to change their lives? What is repentance? It is not a mere sorrow for having

^c Luke iii. 3, 4.

^d Luke xvi. 14.

subjected ourselves to God's displeasure; for then the devils, and those who have died in their sins, would be as great penitents as any: but repentance implies a hatred of sin, and a determination to forsake it: and consequently, the Baptist's injunctions afforded the people a proper test, whereby to ascertain the truth of their professions. If we at this day heard any one expressing a desire after salvation, and were informed that, notwithstanding the plainest warnings, he still held fast his iniquities, and would not part with them; should we give him credit for sincerity? No: we should tell him at once, that all his professions were mere hypocrisy, and that whatever he might pretend respecting a dependence on Christ, he would only deceive his own soul.]

3. The following of the light we have, is a good preparative for more light—

[A man brought out of a dungeon cannot bear at once the full blaze of the meridian sun; he must be brought to it by degrees: so neither can we bear at once the bright effulgence of Divine truth. Our blessed Lord told his Disciples, that "he had many things to say unto them, which they were not at that time able to bear:" and "he spoke the word in parables, *as the people were able to hear it.*" St. Paul adopted the same method of apportioning to his people his instructions according to their respective capacities; "giving milk to babes, and strong meat to those who were of full age." Had he not attended to this rule, he would have produced the same effects as would follow from a wrong administration of corporeal food: he would have destroyed those whom he designed to nourish: whereas by a more judicious conduct, he trained up the children for stronger food and higher attainments. Thus the Baptist directed his hearers to cultivate the acknowledged duties of humanity, honesty, and contentment: that in the exercise of these duties, they might gain a deeper insight into the evil of their past ways, and a fuller preparation of heart for a due reception of the Gospel.]

Let us LEARN then from hence,

1. The importance of ministerial fidelity—

[People in general love to have a minister who will "prophesy unto them smooth things and prophesy deceits." But what will be the end of such things? "If the blind lead the blind, shall they not both fall into the ditch?" It may be painful to us to hear the truth, when we are called to "pluck out a right eye, and to cut off a right hand:" but it is better far that we should be informed of our danger, than that we should be left to involve ourselves in irremediable ruin. We are told that many of the publicans and harlots actually

repented, and became partakers of the kingdom of heaven. Did not *they* bless him? And will they not continue to bless God for him to all eternity? Do not then be grieved, if your minister lay his axe to the root of your sins, if he “cry aloud, and spare not.” It is his duty to do so; and if he forbear to warn you, “your blood will be required at his hands.” He must “not use flattering words;” but must “commend himself to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.” It is in that way only that he can “deliver his own soul,” or hope to save the people committed to his charge.]

2. The need of mortifying our besetting sins—

[Every man has some sins to which he is more particularly addicted, or, at least, to which he is more exposed. His age, his situation, his employment in life, have some peculiar snares, against which he ought to guard. Every one therefore should inquire, what are the dangers to which he is more especially exposed. Persons advanced in life should examine themselves respecting querulousness: men of business should maintain a jealousy respecting worldliness and the frauds of trade: young people should watch over the vanity of their minds, and the violence of their passions. In short, the inquiry of every one should be, what have *I* to guard against? What have *I* to do? What are the chief obstacles to *my* advancement in religious knowledge, and to *my* attainment of everlasting happiness? Happy indeed would it be, if we were thus intent, every one on his own particular case! and happy would it be, if, having found out our besetting sins, we could say with the Psalmist, “I have kept myself from *my* iniquity!” Doubtless there is much beyond this: this is only the threshold of the sanctuary: but it is a threshold which we must pass over, before we can get within the veil. It is not our concern at present to expatiate upon the Divine life, as it is experienced by the advanced Christian: we are now only preaching, like John, the baptism of repentance; reserving to other occasions the fuller delineation of the Gospel salvation. But we shall have attained no trifling object, if the drunkard, the swearer, the whoremonger, or any other person, be led to see, that, till he has put away his besetting sins, he can no more go to heaven, than Satan himself be brought there from the depths of hell.]

3. The moral tendency of the Gospel—

[The things insisted on by John, are mere preliminaries: instead of being the whole Gospel, they are only an introduction to the Gospel. The Gospel itself is not satisfied with a renunciation of evil habits; it requires also the cultivation of good ones: not to put away selfishness, dishonesty, and discontent, but to live altogether above this world, and to be

ready even to "lay down our lives for the brethren." It does not call us to believe in Christ, in order that we may afterwards indulge in sin; but that our hearts may be purified by faith, and that we may be transformed into the very image of our God.

See then who are the true *Antinomians*: not they who urge you to come to Christ for life and salvation, but they who tell you that to be honest and just, and sober and charitable, is all that is required of you. With such persons it is common to quote those words of Balaam, "Do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with thy God." But they quite forget the walking humbly with God; and then confine the doing justice and loving mercy to a few outward acts. Give the full scope to these words, and they do contain the whole of our duty: but we must omit no part of them: nor must we reduce any part to the puny standard of Pharisaic morality. Look at Christ and his Apostles, and there we see the morality which we are to aspire after. Those who are inquiring after Christ, do well to ask, What shall I do? but those who profess to have believed in Christ, must rather ask, "What do I more than others^e?"

^e Matt. v. 47.

MCCCCLXXXIII.

THE IMPRISONMENT OF JOHN.

Luke iii. 19, 20. *Herod the tetrarch, being reprov'd by him for Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done, added yet this above all, that he shut up John in prison.*

THE inspired volume, when considered only as containing a history of other ages and other nations, is read rather for the purpose of informing the mind, than of benefiting the heart; and hence it produces comparatively little effect even on those who are most conversant with its contents. But the true light in which it should be regarded is, as *a history of man*, to whatever age or nation he may belong. It is a *mirror, that reflects the human heart* in all its dispositions, and in all its actings: and, when viewed in this light, it acquires a ten-fold greater importance, because it exhibits us to ourselves, and makes *us* the actors in all that is done.

In reading an account of John the Baptist, and of

his imprisonment by Herod, we feel but little interest, except as we condemn the licentiousness of Herod, and commiserate the fate of his faithful monitor. But if we would divest ourselves of the idea that it passed many centuries ago, and consider the transaction as having recently occurred in our own neighbourhood, we should almost of necessity be led to contemplate it in a more general view, and to notice in it *the power and malignity of sin*. It is in that view that I propose to call your attention to it at this time.

Let us take occasion then to remark from it,

I. The power of sin—

Wonderful indeed is its power to blind, to enslave, to harden all in whom it dwells—

1. It blinds—

[Herod could not but know, that it was wrong for him to take his brother Philip's wife. Yet doubtless he contrived by some vain excuses to justify it to himself. And thus it is that every sinner deludes himself. In some cases, he denies the criminality of his actions altogether, "calling evil good, and good evil, and putting darkness for light, and light for darkness^a." Where they cannot altogether hide from themselves the evil of their ways, they find some excuse, either from their constitutional propensities, or the habits of all around them, or some peculiarity in their situation at the time. "They feed on ashes; and yet to such a degree hath a deceived heart turned them aside, that they cannot deliver their souls, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand^b?" Whatever be the particular lust of which they are enamoured — — — it is "Satan that hath blinded their eyes^c;" they walk in the vanity of their mind, "having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their hearts^d:" and "they know not whither they go, because that darkness hath blinded their eyes^e."]

2. It enslaves—

[Though Herod was willing to "do many things," and forbear many things respecting which he was admonished by John, he could in no wise be prevailed on to part with his incestuous consort. And thus it is with sinners of every description: there are some sins to which they have but little inclination, and which therefore they may be induced to renounce: but

^a Isai. v. 20.

^b Isai. xlv. 20.

^c 2 Cor. iv. 4.

^d Eph. iv. 18.

^e 1 John ii. 11.

their besetting sin they cannot find it in their hearts to mortify, so addicted are they to the commission of it, and, as it were, "tied and bound with it as with a chain," which they cannot break^f — — — Whilst they see, and cannot but acknowledge the sinfulness of their habits, they have a "law in their members warring against the law in their minds, and bringing them into captivity to the law of sin which is in their members^g;" or rather, they are "taken in the snare of the devil, and led captive by him at his will^h."]

3. It hardens—

[One would have supposed that when Herod, "knowing that John was a holy and just man, feared" him, he would never have been induced to persecute him for his fidelity. Yet of his own mind he had imprisoned John, and would have put him to death, had he not been restrained by his fear of the people; and, when solicited by his daughter to give her John's head in a charger, he sent an executioner to behead him, and presented it to her according to her desire. This he did for his oath's sake. But how could any oath bind him to the commission of murder? He would have found ample means of inducing her to alter her request, if sin had not "seared his conscience," and "made his heart as adamant." But sin is of its own nature progressive: and to such a degree do men become "hardened through the deceitfulness of sin," that evils, which once they could not have contemplated as possible ever to be committed by them, are committed easily and without remorse. Hazael, when warned of the enormities which he would one day commit, exclaimed, "Is thy servant a dog that he should do such things?" Yet he afterwards executed these things to the full extent of the predictions concerning him. And if the future conduct of many, who are now but just beginning their career of sin, were opened to their view, they would not believe that they should ever attain to such impiety. But, what is said of strife, may be said of every other sin; namely, that "the beginning of it is like the letting out of water:" the breach at first is small; but it soon widens, till the inundation becomes irresistibly powerful, and irremediably destructive.]

Such is the power of sin; of which in the history we may yet further see,

II. The malignity—

It tends to inflict misery,

1. On all who indulge it—

^f See this in the drunkard, the whoremonger, &c. &c.

^g Rom. vii. 23.

^h 2 Tim. ii. 26.

[Look at Herod in the midst of all his indulgences : was he happy ? Which of the two, I would ask, was the happier ; Herod, in the midst of his excesses, or John, when bound with chains in prison for righteousness' sake ? No one, I think, can entertain a doubt. The truth is, that sin and misery are indissolubly connected even in this life ; according as the Apostle, speaking of the ungodly, has said, " Destruction and misery are *in* their ways, and the way of peace have they not known^l." Take the adulterer, for instance : You may suppose him as happy as his heart can wish. But what is Job's account of him ? " The eye of the adulterer waiteth for the twilight, saying, No eye shall see me ; and *he disguiseth his face*. In the dark they dig through houses which they had marked for themselves in the-day time. *They know not the light* : for the morning is to them even as the shadow of death : *if one know them, they are in the terrors of the shadow of death*^k." And of the wicked generally, Eliphaz says, " The wicked man travaileth with pain all his days : a dreadful sound is in his ears : he believeth not that he shall return out of darkness, and he is waited for of the sword^l." Yes, an evil conscience will so haunt a man, that he shall be afraid to go out into the dark, or almost even to look under his bed : so truly is it said, " The way of transgressors is hard^m." There are indeed those who will profess to feel no apprehensions : but we are assured by the heart-searching God, that their boastings are vain : for " the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt : there is no peace, saith my God, to the wickedⁿ."]

2. On the world at large—

[See what misery the gratification of Herod's lusts produced ; on Philip, whose wife he took ; on Herodias, whose mind and conscience he so defiled ; on John, whom for his fidelity he murdered ; and on all the Church of God, whom he thus deprived of a faithful counsellor and instructor. But he cared not what evils he inflicted, if only he might have his own licentious passions gratified. And who can tell what miseries the seducer inflicts upon his hapless victim ; and the adulterer, on the object of his unlawful desires ? — — The same may be spoken of the ambitious man, who wades through seas of blood to the attainment of fame and power — — — May I not mention the scoffer too, who hates and derides all serious piety, and cares not how many souls he ruins, provided he may but indulge his enmity against God and his Christ ? — — — But what is it that has turned the whole world into one vast theatre

^l Rom. iii. 16, 17.

^k Job xxiv. 15—17.

^l Job xv. 20—22.

^m Prov. xiii. 15.

ⁿ Isai. lvii. 20, 21.

of contention and sorrow? It is sin, which has established its empire on the ruins of peace and love. Nor is there to be found a nation, or family, or individual, whose happiness has not suffered from this malignant evil.]

From this subject we may yet further LEARN,

1. The danger of indulging sin—

[Who shall say whither one sinful thought shall carry us? Little did Herod imagine to what the first desire which he formed after Philip's wife would lead him. And little did David anticipate the results of the first glance which he caught of Bathsheba. Say not then, of a sinful thought or desire, that it is little: but learn to flee from it as from the face of a serpent; and let every declension from the path of duty be viewed by you as a step towards hell itself — — —]

2. The duty of reproofing it—

[We are not all called to act like John, and to obtrude our remarks on the ears of kings and princes. But a holy fidelity becomes us all in our respective spheres. We must take care indeed that we do not reprove others in a wrong spirit. There are many circumstances wherein silence may be the most effectual reproof. But a holy fortitude becomes us all. We must all be witnesses for God in the place where we live, and shine as lights in a dark world. And if for our fidelity we be called to suffer, as John suffered, we must rejoice that we are so honoured of our God, and be willing to lay down our own lives, if only we may save the souls of others.]

MCCCCLXXXIV.

THE DESCENT OF THE SPIRIT UPON CHRIST.

Luke iii. 21, 22. *Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened; and the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased.*

IN every part of our Lord's history, from his first entrance into the world to his dissolution upon the cross, we observe an astonishing combination of the most opposite events: we see the majesty of heaven degraded to the lowest depths of humiliation; and the meanest of mankind, who was "a worm, and no man, the very scorn of men, and the outcast of the people," exalted to the highest honours that Heaven

itself could confer upon him. Observe the circumstance of his birth: what can we conceive more degrading than for the Saviour of the world to be born in a stable, and to be laid in a manger? Yet, to counterbalance this, angels were sent to announce his advent, and a star to point out to the inquiring Magi the place of his nativity. Thus it was also at his baptism. The ordinance of baptism was intended to intimate the need which we have to be washed from our sins: Jesus, therefore, could not submit to baptism without acknowledging, in appearance, that he was a sinner, like unto us: nevertheless, for wise and gracious reasons, he insisted that that rite should be administered to him. But whatever ignominy might attach to him on this account, the offence was completely rolled away by the interposition of his God and Father, who on that occasion bore testimony to him by an audible voice from heaven, and by a visible descent of the Holy Ghost upon him. These are the two subjects for our present consideration. We notice,

I. The *visible* descent of the Holy Ghost upon him—

There are many things relative to the descent of the Spirit upon Jesus, which are worthy of observation—

1. The *time* of it was remarkable—

[*Jesus had just conformed to God's ordinance* of baptism. Though he had no need of baptism, (not having any sin to wash away,) yet, as it was a rite instituted by God for the introducing of men into the Messiah's kingdom, he judged it expedient to comply with it himself, that he might "fulfill all righteousness" in his own person, and be in all things a pattern to his followers. This was well pleasing to God, who cannot but be interested in the observance of his own ordinances. And the conferring of so distinguished an honour upon Jesus on that occasion clearly shews, that "God will honour those who honour him;" and that in a reverential attendance on the instituted means of grace, we may expect blessings which we shall in vain hope for in the neglect of them^a.

He was, moreover, actually engaged in prayer. On three

^a Those who absent themselves from the House of God under the idea that they can spend their time more profitably at home, and those who stay away from the Lord's table under an apprehension of their unworthiness to go to it, would do well to consider this.

different occasions did the Father bear testimony to Jesus by an audible voice from heaven; and every time was either in, or immediately after, prayer^b. What an evidence does this afford us of the importance and efficacy of prayer! And who that lives nigh to God in the exercise of that duty, has not found that promise realized, "Thou shalt call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am^c?" Audible voices, indeed, we are not to expect; but we are sure that "God has never said to any, Seek ye my face in vain."

There was something peculiar also in *the manner* of it—

[It was of great importance that the attestation thus publicly given to the character of Jesus should be such as could admit of no doubt. Accordingly "the heavens were opened," just as they afterwards were at the time of Stephen's death^d, so that the very throne of God, as it were, became visible to mortal eyes; and the Holy Ghost descended visibly, in a bodily appearance, and abode upon him. Whether the Holy Ghost assumed the shape of a dove, or only appeared in a luminous body with a hovering motion, like that of a dove, we do not take upon us to determine^e: but the appearance was such as could leave no doubt in the minds of the spectators that there was a special communication to Jesus from heaven, even such a communication as had never before been vouchsafed to mortal man.]

But *the ends* of the Spirit's descent are most worthy of our attention—

[We are sure that it was designed to *confirm the Baptist's mind*. The providence of God had so ordered events, that John and Jesus, though related to each other, had lived thirty years in the world without forming any acquaintance with each other. Had they been intimate with each other, it might have been thought that an agreement had been formed between them to deceive the world: but John had no knowledge of the person of Jesus, till he was inspired to point him out as "the Lamb of God, that was to take away the sin of the world:" and this very sign was promised to John, as the means whereby his mind should be satisfied that the testimony which he had borne was true: and John himself declares, that his own conviction of Christ's Messiahship was grounded on this very thing^f.

But there was another end, even *the inauguration of the Messiah himself* to his high office. The Jewish kings and

^b At his baptism (see the text), at his transfiguration (Luke ix. 29, 35.), and just before his death (John xii. 28.).

^c Isai. lviii. 9. and lxxv. 24.

^d Acts vii. 55, 56.

^e We rather think the latter. See Doddridge on the place.

^f John i. 32—34.

priests, and in some instances the prophets also, were anointed with oil at the time of their consecration to their work: and therefore it behoved Jesus, in whom all these offices were to be combined, to be set apart for them by a nobler unction. Accordingly he was “anointed with the oil of joy and gladness above his fellows^g.” It had been expressly foretold that he should be so anointed^h, and that “the Holy Spirit should rest upon himⁱ; and he himself mentioned, in his very first sermon, that these prophecies were then accomplished; and that he was then executing the very office for which he had been commissioned and qualified by that peculiar unction^k.]

Besides this visible attestation to his character, we are called to notice also,

II. The *audible* testimony of the Father to him—

In many different ways did the Father bear witness to his Son: every miracle that was wrought by Jesus was a seal whereby the Father attested the truth of his divine mission. But on this occasion he addressed his Son by an audible voice; and therein bore witness to,

1. His person as the promised Messiah—

[The Messiah had been long foretold under the character of “the Son of Man^l,” and that term was understood by the Jews as equivalent to the Son of God^m. That Jesus did indeed sustain this character, and that he was the very person of whom all the prophets spake, was a point to be proved; and God determined that it should be proved by every species of evidence that could be adduced. Hence, besides the foregoing proof which was offered to the eyes of men, another was added which appealed to their ears. And in the very words which are used, there seems a reference to the prophecies which were accomplished in him. “Thou art *that* my beloved Son,” *that* Son, whose advent has been so long foretold, and so long expectedⁿ. In this view the expression of the text precisely corresponds with that which had been long before used by the Prophet Isaiah: “Behold my servant whom I uphold, mine elect in whom my soul delighteth: *I have put my Spirit upon him; HE shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles*.” Whatever pretensions, therefore, false Christs may urge, or whatever

^g Ps. xlv. 7.

^h Isai. lxi. 1.

ⁱ Isai. xi. 2.

^k Luke iv. 17—21.

^l Dan. vii. 13.

^m Luke xxii. 69, 70.

ⁿ There is a force in the repetition of the article, which, though lost in the Translation, should not be overlooked.

^o Isai. xlii. 1.

objections infidel professors of Christianity may raise against Jesus, we have the infallible testimony of God himself that Jesus is the Christ.]

2. His acceptableness in that office—

[In every view the Father could not but feel complacency and delight in him. As voluntarily undertaking the mediatorial work, as richly qualified for the discharge of it, and as persevering in it notwithstanding all the difficulties that he should have to encounter, he must be highly acceptable to the Father. But God foresaw the perfect accomplishment of all his designs through the ministration of his dear Son: he saw, as it were, all his elect delivered from their guilt and misery, and made partakers of everlasting glory and felicity: he saw all his own perfections also honoured and exalted in the mystery of redemption: and he cordially approved of it as the most stupendous effort of wisdom and of love. None can henceforth entertain a doubt whether he will accept those who come to him by Christ, since it was on account of the suitability and sufficiency of his atonement that the Father was so “well pleased in him.”]

We may LEARN from hence,

1. How we should think of God—

[We know nothing of God except from revelation. It is presumptuous, therefore, either to form notions about him from our own vague conjectures, or to refuse our assent to the representations which he has given us of himself. That there is a Trinity of the persons in the Godhead is doubtless an incomprehensible mystery: but it is plainly revealed in numberless passages of Scripture. It is indeed from other passages that we know each of the persons in the Trinity to be God: but that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, are Three distinct persons, is as clear as any truth can be: and so clearly is it intimated in the very words of our text, that the ancients were wont to say, “Go to Jordan, and there learn the doctrine of the Trinity.”]

2. How we should act towards him—

[All that is required of us is, to be like-minded with God. Did God point him out as his beloved Son? let us believe in him as the Messiah, the Saviour of the world. Did the Father profess himself well pleased in him? let us delight ourselves in him: let it be the joy of our hearts to contemplate his fulness and sufficiency, and to be receiving out of his fulness grace for grace. Let us, in short, “count all things but dung for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ,” and glory in him as all our salvation, and all our desire.]

MCCCCLXXXV.

OUR LORD'S FIRST SERMON AT NAZARETH.

Luke iv. 21, 22. *And he began to say unto them, This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears. And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth.*

THE Sabbath was appointed as a day of rest; yet not altogether for the rest of the body, but that the soul might be the more at leisure to acquaint itself with God. In this view it is a most gracious and merciful appointment; because, the time being fixed, all are disengaged at once, and ready both to serve their God together, and to receive instruction respecting their duty towards him. Our blessed Lord, after he had entered upon his ministry, employed *every* day in the execution of his work: but he availed himself especially of the opportunity which the Sabbaths afforded him, to instruct the people. At Nazareth, where he had been brought up, “he went into their synagogue, as his custom was;” and being called upon to read the portion of Scripture appointed for the day, he stood up and read a passage from the prophecies of Isaiah; and then sat down to expound it. His exposition or comment is not given us: but the substance of it is set before us, in few, but comprehensive, words.

It is our intention to consider,

I. His comment on the Scripture—

When he told the people, that on that very day the passage which he had read to them was fulfilled in their ears, we must suppose him to have spoken to this effect:

‘I am the person whom the Father has sent—

[‘From my mean appearance you will be ready to think that I can have no pretensions to the office of the Messiah: but it is of me that the prophet speaks in the words which I have now read: I am the person on whom the Spirit has been poured out; “the Lord hath anointed ME, and sent ME” to instruct and save the world.]

‘And this is the commission which I am come to execute—

[“The poor” are the special objects of my attention; they being particularly “chosen of my Father to be rich in faith, and heirs of my kingdom.” Yet, if any be “poor in spirit,” and sensible of their low and lost estate, to them am I sent; and to declare to them the glad tidings of salvation, is the delightful work which I have undertaken.

‘More particularly, if any be “broken-hearted” with a sense of guilt and misery, I am come “to heal” them by an application of my blood and Spirit to their souls: their guilt will I remove by my all-atoning blood; and their misery, by sending them my Holy Spirit to be their comforter and guide—— It is not as a temporal prince or conqueror that I am come: my conquests are altogether of a spiritual nature; but they are irresistible, and shall be complete. Are any persons so blinded by Satan, and enslaved by sin, that they appear like captives, immured in a dungeon, and bereft of sight, and galled with massive chains^a? I am come to set them free, not only breaking off their fetters, and restoring them to the light, but renewing even their organs of vision, and bringing them into the glorious liberty of the sons of God—— And this I shall do, not by war and bloodshed, but by an exhibition of truth to their souls. The word is my sword, and the ministry of it is that chariot in which I will ride on, conquering and to conquer, till every enemy be put under my feet^b——

‘In a word, you all know what is done in the year of jubilee, how debts are cancelled, slaves are liberated, and inheritances are restored: such are the benefits which I impart: I proclaim the arrival of that happy period, at least as far as respects the souls of men. Whatever debt of sin any man may owe, it shall be forgiven him: his bondage, however severe, shall be brought to an end: and his inheritance, however justly forfeited, shall be restored to him, even all the inheritance of heaven——

‘Thus circumstantially has the prophet described my office, which already I have begun to execute: “This very day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears:” and all of you who will believe in me, shall enjoy the benefits I am come to bestow.’]

Such we may suppose to have been our Saviour’s comment on the Scripture which he had read. Let us next view,

II. The effect produced by it—

^a This was a common mode of treating captives. Sampson was so treated by the Philistines (Judg. xvi. 21.), and Zedekiah by Nebuchadnezzar. (2 Kings xxv. 7.)

^b Thrice it is said, “He hath sent me to preach.”

This was far different from what might have been expected: yet it will afford much instruction to us—

1. They listened—

[No sooner had he read the passage, than “the eyes of all were attentively fixed on him.” The sublimity of the words, and the impressive energy with which they were read, engaged their attention, and made them very desirous of hearing what this celebrated teacher should deduce from them.

Happy would it be, if this eagerness to receive instruction were more visible amongst us. But, in general, when a minister has read the words which he proposes to explain, many, instead of putting forth all the powers of their minds to understand and apply the subject, compose themselves in the most easy posture, and sink habitually into listlessness and indifference; satisfied with having performed a duty, though they reaped not the smallest benefit — — — But consider, the word which you hear, though spoken by a sinful man like yourselves, is, as far as it is agreeable to the mind and will of God, to be regarded “not as the word of man, but as the word of God.” “We are ambassadors for Christ; we speak to you in Christ’s stead; and God himself beseeches you by us.” Whenever, therefore, you hear the Scriptures explained, you should, like the Centurion and his friends^c, receive the word with all humility of mind, and treasure it up in your memory for the regulating of your hearts and lives — — —]

2. They wondered—

[Their wonder arose, in part, from their recollection of his parentage and education, which appeared to them ill suited to his high pretensions. But, in part also, it arose from the suavity of his manner, and the exalted nature of his discourse, to which they could not but “bear witness.” And well indeed might they wonder that such a messenger should be sent from heaven, and that such blessings should be imparted unto men.

But alas! the very same truths delivered amongst us are heard with indifference: yea, though opened in the fullest manner, and exhibited in the clearest light, they are regarded as uninteresting speculations, if not as an idle tale. The work and offices of Christ may be explained, and all the wonders of redeeming love be opened to our view, and yet no admiration be excited; yea, the talents of the speaker may be admired, and the subject itself be overlooked. But would this be the case if men felt their need of this salvation? — — — No, surely: they would be filled with rapture, and adore their God all the day long — — —]

^c Acts x. 33.

3. They disobeyed—

[Much as they were struck with the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth, they could not overcome their prejudices. They had but lately seen him following the humble occupation of a carpenter, and they could not conceive that such an one could possibly be the Messiah. Hence they did not receive his testimony: hence also, when warned of the danger of rejecting him, and of God's determination to communicate to the Gentiles those blessings which they despised, they burned with rage against him, and sought to destroy him.

Alas! how common a character is this! How many are there who hear, and to a certain degree approve, the Gospel, while yet they are not effectually changed by it! They are still under the dominion of prejudice and passion; and sit in judgment on the Gospel, instead of yielding obedience to it. The sublimity of its doctrines is a stumbling-block to them; and the purity of its precepts an offence. What is gratifying to their feelings they will receive; but whatever tends to the mortifying of their pride or the subduing of their besetting sins, they will not endure — — —

O that the example before us may put us on our guard! This day is this Scripture fulfilled in our ears, as truly as in the day that Jesus read it in the synagogue. Jesus is still the anointed Saviour: still does he retain and execute the commission given him by the Father: still does he “say to the oppressed, Go free:” the captive that is bruised with chains, and deprived of sight, and broken-hearted with a sense of his sorrows, may even now be restored to sight, and liberty, and joy. Our adorable Saviour is ever ready to give him “the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness” — — —

Beloved brethren, “receive not this grace in vain;” neither be contented with a partial approbation of the Gospel: but surrender up yourselves unfeignedly and unreservedly unto the Lord; ever dreading, lest your misimprovement of the light afforded you should provoke him to remove your candlestick, and to transfer your advantages to others.]

MCCCCLXXXVI.

PHYSICIAN, HEAL THYSELF.

Luke iv. 23. *And he said unto them, Ye will surely say unto me this proverb, Physician, heal thyself.*

WE are told that “Solomon spake three thousand proverbs^a.” To condense the results of general

^a 1 Kings iv. 32.

observation in some brief sentence, was a mode of communication which wise and learned men of old greatly affected: and to search out what was so communicated, was a study in which the young were deeply employed^b. By proverbs every species of instruction was imparted. By them, also, were reproof and encouragement conveyed with peculiar force and emphasis. Nor was there any one so wise, but he might be addressed in this manner without offence. Even our blessed Lord, after having represented himself as the great Healer of the world, conceived that his hearers would apply to him this proverb, "Physician, heal thyself." This, doubtless, was a common proverb at that time, as it is also amongst us at the present day: and it shall be my endeavour to shew,

I. What is its import—

It may be understood,

1. As a sarcastic reflection—

[This is the precise view in which it was understood by our blessed Lord. He had wrought many miracles at Capernaum: and now at Nazareth, where he had lived from his earliest years, the people hoped to see similar exertions of his almighty power: and, because he did not see fit to gratify their unreasonable expectations, they doubted the truth of the reports which they had heard concerning him. Hence "our Lord said to them, Ye will surely say unto me this proverb, 'Physician, heal thyself.' *Whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in thine own country.*" But they had no right to dictate to him thus. The report of what he had done in Capernaum was authenticated beyond all reasonable doubt; and the people of Nazareth ought to have believed in him. But, being offended at him on account of his low parentage and connexions, they could not endure to regard him as their promised Messiah: and it was to punish this unbelief, that our Lord withheld from them any further evidence at that time. This is the account given both by St. Matthew and St Luke^c: and this shews the precise meaning of the proverb, as applied to him by his countrymen at that time. Its meaning was, 'You profess yourself the Messiah; and, if you do not give us all the proofs of it which you have given to others, we will not receive you. We shall take

^b Prov. i. 5, 6.

^c ver. 22—24. with Matt. xiii. 54—58.

it for granted that you are incompetent to the task; and that you decline all efforts for our conviction, because you are not able to impose on us, who know you, in the way that you have imposed on others, to whom you were not so well known.' Thus was the proverb used by them as a sarcastic reflection; intimating, that he could not do in his own country what he pretended to have done at a distance from it.]

2. As a salutary admonition—

[Certainly, a person seeking to reform others should, so to speak, begin at home; and, if he do not, he will provoke others to retaliate with this advice, "Physician, heal thyself." It is in this sense that the proverb is more generally used amongst ourselves. And in this sense it exactly accords with the instruction given by our Lord, in his Sermon on the Mount: "Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, and perceivest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Either, how canst thou say to thy brother, Brother, let me pull out the mote that is in thine eye, when thou thyself beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye; and then thou shalt see clearly to pull out the mote that is in thy brother's eye^d." In this view it is a salutary admonition, for which all must be prepared who would do good to others: and to cut off all just occasion for it must be the one labour of their lives.]

When we see our blessed Lord supposing it applied to himself, it will be desirable to ascertain,

II. To whom it may with propriety be addressed—

You will bear in mind, that our Lord was supposed to possess and exercise such powers as fully attested his divine mission. These powers the people of Nazareth, therefore, called upon him to display amongst them: and on his compliance with these terms, they suspended their acceptance of him as their promised Messiah. Had he never given sufficient proof of his divine mission, they would have been justified in demanding more convincing evidence of it. But what he had done at Capernaum was abundantly sufficient to shew that God was with him of a truth; and therefore their demand was unreasonable, and the refusal of it was a just punishment

^d Luke vi. 41, 42.

for their incredulity. But we may well apply the proverb,

1. To the proud moralist, who pours contempt upon the Gospel—

[Many, like the Pharisees of old, adhere to the law of works, and regard the Gospel as foolishness. Their principles, they judge, are quite sufficient for the effecting of every thing that is necessary for their salvation. Then, I say, ‘ Prove it to us. You profess that you have satisfied others: but, before we can acquiesce in your high pretensions, we call upon you to satisfy us. “ Physician, whoever thou art, heal thyself,” and let us see in thee a proof of the efficacy of those principles of which thou boastest. That they will suffice to “ cleanse the outside of the cup and platter,” we readily admit: but that they will operate effectually to the cleansing of the inside, we greatly doubt. We will admit the truth of all that was alleged by thy great prototype in the Temple: “ I thank thee, O God, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican: I fast twice in the week; I give tithes of all that I possess^e.” But, in our view of religion, humility, and faith, and love, are very primary and essential parts: and we beg leave to ask, What evidence thou givest us of these? we see not of these any proof whatever: and, till we see them visibly wrought into the frame and constitution of thy soul, we must call in question all thy high pretensions; and must consider thy rejection of the Gospel as a proof of thine own pride, and ignorance, and unbelief” — — —]

2. To the censorious professor, who dishonours the Gospel—

[Almost all classes of Christians are ready to censure and condemn those who differ from them: and, even in their own society, there are but too many who cast on each other unkind and censorious reflections: and, in fact, those who are the most faulty themselves are the foremost in finding fault with others. This disposition greatly prevailed amongst the Pharisaic Jews; who, boasting of their high privileges, were forward to condemn others, whilst they themselves were guilty of the very same or worse enormities than those which they censured in others. Hence St. Paul, in the true spirit of this proverb, reproveth them; saying, “ Thou who teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest, a man should not steal, dost thou steal? thou that sayest, a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege^f?” Now, in this, must I reply to

^e Luke xviii. 11, 12.

^f Rom. ii. 21, 22.

multitudes of professing Christians: do you complain of others as carnal and worldly and covetous, and are ye yourselves faulty in these respects? Do ye complain of pride, anger, and uncharitableness in others, and yet indulge them in yourselves? Do ye censure others for bigotry and intolerance, and yet betray the same unhallowed spirit towards those who differ from you? In a word, look at home; and let your severity be directed rather against your own defects, than the defects of others; and, instead of prescribing remedies so profusely to others, apply them first for the healing of the disorders of your own souls.]

3. To true believers, who desire to adorn and recommend the Gospel—

[Be sure that those to whom you recommend the Gospel will first mark its operation upon *your* minds: and, if they see that it has done little or nothing for you, they will not be disposed to expect any great benefits from it to themselves. On the contrary, if they see that it has wrought a valuable change on you, they will be ready to receive it, in order that they themselves may be made partakers of the same benefits. Hence, your first care must be to experience all its sanctifying and saving operations in your own souls; that, when you commend it to others, you may be able to say, “What my eyes have seen, my ears have heard, and my hands have handled, of the word of life, that same declare I unto you^g.” St. Paul could appeal to his hearers, “how holily, justly, and unblameably he had behaved himself among them^h,” and could boldly say, “Whatsoever ye have heard and seen in me, do, and the God of peace shall be with youⁱ.” This rendered his word incomparably more powerful than it would have been under other circumstances; and no doubt, if you also can make a similar appeal, whether you be ministers or private Christians, it will give ten-fold effect to your instructions. To all, then, I would say, labour first to improve the Gospel for the sanctification and comfort of your own souls; and then will those who behold the brightness of your light, acknowledge that God is with you of a truth; and that the Gospel, which has wrought such things for you, is worthy of universal acceptance.]

^g 1 John i. 1—3.

^h 1 Thess. ii. 10.

ⁱ Phil. iv. 9.

MCCCLXXXVII.

CHRIST ESCAPES FROM HIS BLOOD-THIRSTY PERSECUTORS.

Luke iv. 28—30. *And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, and rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the*

hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong. But he passing through the midst of them went his way.

NOTHING is more uncertain or transient than popular applause. However just may be the grounds of any praise that is bestowed, the smallest circumstance is sufficient to obliterate all remembrance of a person's merit, and to render him an object of general indignation. At the close of his life our Lord experienced this in a most astonishing degree: for the very people, who but three days before had followed him with acclamations and hosannas, were instigated by their rulers to cry out with equal fervour, "Crucify him, crucify him." Scarcely inferior to this was the instance that occurred to him the very first time he preached at Nazareth. When his sermon was but half finished, his auditors were filled with admiration at the gracious words that proceeded out of his mouth: but before the close of it, they rose up in murderous rage in order to destroy him.

We shall consider,

I. The occasion of their wrath—

Our blessed Lord had preached to them in a kind but faithful manner—

[He had opened to them a passage from the prophet Isaiah, and informed them, that it was accomplished in him. This on the whole afforded general satisfaction: but yet he saw that there were some objections lurking in their minds, relative to his parentage and education; and that they were displeased because he had not given a preference to his own townsmen, and wrought his miracles there rather than at other places. These objections he anticipated, and proceeded to return an answer to them. He observed, *first*, that prophets in general were not received in the place where they had been educated, because the people who had known them as equals or inferiors, did not like to submit to them in their prophetic character. *Secondly*, he shewed them, from different instances in the Scriptures, that God had always dispensed his favours in a sovereign manner, and had sometimes imparted them to the despised Gentiles in preference to his own peculiar people.

This was the immediate purport of what he *spoke*; but doubtless there was much more *insinuated*, than what was plainly expressed. His answer was intended to bring

conviction upon their minds, and to shew them, that they were indulging prejudices against him in spite of all they had heard respecting him; and that, if they yielded to their unbelief, they would constrain him to withhold his blessings from them, and even to send them to the Gentile world in preference to them.]

This was the true ground of all their rage—

[They saw the drift of his discourse: but they hated the light; and therefore sought immediately to extinguish it. They were not disposed to contend with him in a way of argument; for they saw that the truth was against them. They resorted therefore to clamour and persecution, the usual substitutes for truth and reason. But to reject him merely, was not sufficient; nor could they be contented even with expelling him from the city: no; nothing but his blood would satisfy them; and therefore, forgetting the sanctity both of the synagogue and of the sabbath, they rose up with one consent, and thrust him out of the city to an eminence, that they might despatch him in a moment. Probably in executing thus, what they would have called, the judgment of zeal^a, they thought they were doing an acceptable service to their God; so blinded were they by their own passions, and “captivated by the devil at his will.”]

The inspired historian has declared to us,

II. The manner in which our Lord escaped its effects—

Our blessed Lord on different occasions withdrew himself from those who loved, and from those who hated him^b. His escape from them at this time may be considered,

I. As it respected *them*—

[His withdrawal from them was *miraculous*, as much as if he had beaten them all down with his word^c, or smitten them with blindness^d, or struck them dead upon the spot^e. The precise mode of his withdrawal is not specified; but it seems that he rendered himself invisible, and thus escaped from their hands.

It was also *merciful*, both as it tended to convince them of his miraculous power, and especially as it prevented them from executing their murderous purposes. What a mercy did David esteem it, when by the interposition of Abigail he was kept from destroying Nabal^f! Much more, if they ever received grace to repent of their wickedness, was it a mercy to those

^a Numb. xxv. 7—13.

^c John xviii. 6.

^e 2 Kings i. 10, 12.

^b Luke xxiv. 31. John viii. 59.

^d Gen. xix. 11. 2 Kings vi. 18.

^f 1 Sam. xxv. 32, 33.

infatuated zealots, that they had not been suffered to imbrue their hands in the blood of God's only Son.

But it was also *judicial*: for, by means of his departure, the people of Nazareth were deprived of many temporal benefits, which, if they had received him more worthily, he would have imparted to them: they were deprived also of his spiritual instructions, which, if duly improved, would have converted and saved their souls.]

2. As it respects *us*—

[In this escape of his we see, *what care he will take of us, and what care we ought to take of ourselves.*

Every faithful servant of God must expect persecution. But he is immortal till his work is done. God will screen him from his enemies, how numerous, potent, or inveterate soever they may be^g. Look at Paul when a conspiracy was formed against his life; and at Peter when chained in an inner prison in order to be brought forth the next day for execution: how seasonably, and in what an unlooked-for manner, did God interpose for their deliverance^h! Thus will he exert his almighty power on behalf of all who serve him faithfully, unless indeed the hour is come for them to receive their full reward. We never need to fear the face of man: for God has “put a hook in the nose, and a bridle in the jaws,” of every man; “nor can any have even the smallest power against us, except it be given him from above.”

But notwithstanding our assurance of Divine protection, we ought to take all prudent precautions to avoid the fury of our enemies, and to avail ourselves of those methods of escape which God in his providence has opened to us. “If they persecute us in one city, we should flee to another,” and like Paul, when “let down by the wall in a basket,” elude the resentment which we cannot pacify. We must not indeed deny Christ, or decline any duty, even though death should be the inevitable and immediate consequence of our fidelity: but we must never court death, if we have an opportunity of saving our lives by privacy or flight.]

INFER—

1. What need have all Christ's followers to count the cost before they take up a profession of religion!

[Ministers indeed, for the most part, are called to stand foremost in the post of danger, and to bear the brunt of the battle: but every soldier of Christ is called to “endure hardness,” and to “fight a good fight.” If by our life and

^g Zech. ii. 5. Isai. xxxiii. 21, 22. 2 Kings vi. 16, 17.

^h Acts xxiii. 12, 13, 16—24. Acts xii. 5—8.

conversation we condemn the world, though the reproof be tacit, and rather intimated than expressed, the world will be filled with wrath against us; and, if suffered by God, will persecute us unto death. Let us then know what we are to expect, and stand at all times prepared for the worst.]

2. What a ground of thankfulness should we esteem it, if we are in any measure divested of carnal prejudice!

[All of us, if not restrained by God, should, like the Nazarenes, be ready to vent our indignation even against Christ himself, if he uttered any truths offensive to our ears. What a mercy then is it if we can hear our sins condemned, and have our indignation turned against *them*, rather than against our faithful monitor! Let us cultivate this disposition, whether it respects the public preaching of the word, or private admonition. Against our sins we cannot manifest too much displeasure. Happy would it be for us, if by one act of zeal we could despatch them utterly. Let us at least set ourselves against them without delay, and prosecute them from henceforth without intermission, and without mercy.]

MCCCCLXXXVIII.

AN UNCLEAN SPIRIT CAST OUT.

Luke iv. 33, 34. *And in the synagogue there was a man which had a spirit of an unclean devil, and cried out with a loud voice, saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth?*

IF any doubt the existence and agency of devils, the history before us is well calculated to satisfy them upon that head. It is evident that though Satan spake by the mouth of the man whom he possessed, he spake in his own person, and in the name of those other spirits that were leagued with him. To represent this man as disordered with an epilepsy or falling sickness is to confound things which the evangelist was most careful to distinguish^a. Besides, we cannot conceive that a physician (for such was St. Luke) should mention it as a remarkable circumstance that a disorder “did not hurt” a man by leaving him^b; whereas, if we suppose this to have been a demoniacal possession, the observation is just

^a ver. 40, 41.

^b ver. 35.

and proper; for we may be sure that when Satan threw down his poor vassal, he would have hurt, yea, killed him too, if Jesus, by an invisible but almighty agency, had not interposed to prevent it. There being many accounts of evil spirits cast out by our Lord, we shall not advert to *every* circumstance of this miracle, but endeavour to improve that particular incident mentioned in the text; viz. the request of Satan that Jesus would let him alone. In order to this we shall,

I. State the grounds of Satan's request—

In acknowledging Jesus to be “the Holy One of God,” Satan might be actuated by a desire to bring the character of Jesus into suspicion, as though they were in confederacy with each other; or perhaps he wished to impress the people with an idea that none but madmen and demoniacs would make such an acknowledgment: but *in requesting* Jesus to let him alone he was instigated rather by his own fears—

1. He knew Jesus—

[Jesus was like any other poor man; his own Disciples, except on some extraordinary occasions, did not appear acquainted with his real character. But Satan knew him, notwithstanding the lowly habit in which he sojourned among men. He knew Jesus to be the Son of God, who had left the bosom of his Father, that he might take our nature, and dwell amongst us. He was well aware that this Holy One must of necessity feel an irreconcilable aversion to such an “unclean spirit,” such a wicked fiend as he was; while at the same time there was no hope of prevailing against *him* either by fraud or violence. Hence he wished to be left to himself, and to be freed as much as possible from *his* interposition.]

2. He dreaded Jesus—

[It is not impossible but that Satan's expulsion from heaven might have arisen from his refusal to do homage to the Son of God. However this be, he well knew that Jesus was “the promised seed,” who should ultimately “bruise his head.” He had already been foiled in a conflict with this despised Nazarene, and had learned by experience the impossibility of resisting his command. Nor could he be ignorant that Jesus was to be his judge in the last day, when the full measure of his sins should be meted out to him, and his present miseries be greatly augmented. Hence, while he “believed, he trembled.” Hence

those requests which he offered on other occasions, "Torment me not;" "send me not into the deep," that is, the depths of hell. Hence also that question, in the passage before us, "Art thou come to destroy us?" No wonder that, under such circumstances, he should be filled with terror, and ask, as the consummation of his highest wishes, to have a respite granted him.]

That such desires were not peculiar to Satan will appear, while we,

II. Inquire whether similar requests be not offered by many amongst us—

It is certain that many hate the declarations of Christ in his Gospel—

[Men will endure to hear those sins, from which they themselves are free, exposed and condemned; but when the light is brought to discover their besetting sins, they hate it, and wish to have it removed from them. This is found to be the case even in the public ministration of the word. But it obtains in a still higher degree in private and personal admonition. Let a servant of Christ come in his master's name to a man that is proud or covetous, lewd or dissipated, or under the dominion of any particular lust, and let him set before that man the enormity of his besetting sin, and the judgments denounced against it; will *he* find a welcome? will not the sinner wish to change the conversation? will he not say in his heart, perhaps too with his lips, 'Let me alone; what hast thou to do with me?' Will not he regard such a monitor as an enemy to his peace, and be ready to ask, "Art thou come to destroy" all my hope and comfort? Yes; nor is this aversion to the light peculiar to the sensual and profane: it is rather found to be more inveterate among those, whose regularity in outward things has afforded them a ground for self-admiration and self-complacency.]

Such persons accord with Satan both in sentiment and inclination—

[To hate the authority of Christ in his word is exactly the same as to hate his personal authority when he was upon earth: and to wish to have the light of his truth withheld from us, is the same as to desire the restraint of his personal interposition. Nor is this a mere fallible deduction of man's reason; it is the express declaration of God. They, who would not hear the law of the Lord, are represented by the prophet as saying to him, "Prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits, *cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us*." Job speaks yet more

^c Isai. xxx. 9—11.

plainly to the same effect: he represents those who spent their days in wealth and pleasure, as saying to the Almighty, *Depart from us*, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways: what is the Almighty that we should serve him? and what profit should we have if we pray unto him^d? It is evident, that not only the sentiments of these sinners, but also their very expressions, are almost the same with those of Satan in the text.]

To evince the folly of harbouring such dispositions, we shall,

III. Shew the inefficacy of such requests, by whomsoever they may be offered—

It was in vain that Satan pleaded for a temporary liberty to indulge his malice—

[Jesus would not even receive his acknowledgments, but peremptorily enjoined him silence. Nor would he suffer Satan to retain possession of his wretched slave: he would not even permit this cruel enemy to “hurt” him; so little were the wishes of Satan consulted by our Lord and Saviour.]

In vain also will be all our wishes to retain with impunity our beloved lusts—

[God may indeed forbear to counteract us for a season, and say, “Let him alone^e.” When he sees that we “will none of him,” he may justly give us up to our own hearts’ lusts^f. But this would be the heaviest curse that he could inflict upon us. It would be even worse than immediate death, and immediate damnation; because it would afford us further opportunities of “treasuring up wrath” without any hope of obtaining deliverance from it: besides, it would be only for a little time, and then “wrath would come upon us to the uttermost.” When we stand before the judgment-seat we shall in vain say, ‘Let us alone; What have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth?’ Our doom will then be fixed, and our sentence executed with irresistible power and inexorable firmness. When once we are “fallen into the hands of the living God,” all hope of impunity or compassion will have ceased for ever.]

This subject affords us occasion to suggest a word or two of ADVICE—

1. Rest not in a speculative knowledge of Christ—

[We observe that Satan was well acquainted with the person and offices of Christ: but, notwithstanding all he knew, he was a devil still. To what purpose then will be all our knowledge, if we be not sanctified by it? It will only aggravate our guilt, and consequently enhance our condemnation

^d Job xxi. 13—15.

^e Hos. iv. 17.

^f Ps. lxxxix. 11, 12.

also. We never know Jesus aright till we love his presence, and delight in an unreserved compliance with his will.]

2. Endeavour to improve his presence for the good of your souls—

[He comes to us in the preaching of his Gospel: he has promised to be with us whenever we are assembled in his name. Shall we then either by our aversion or indifference say to him, ‘Let us alone?’ Let us rather say, ‘Lord, expel this evil spirit from my heart; take me under thy care; and “fulfil in me all thy good pleasure.”’ Thus shall the “prince of this world be cast out:” and we, his poor vassals, be “brought into the glorious liberty of the children of God.”]

MCCCCLXXXIX.

PETER'S WIFE'S MOTHER CURED.

Luke iv. 38, 39. *And he arose out of the synagogue, and entered into Simon's house. And Simon's wife's mother was taken with a great fever; and they besought him for her. And he stood over her, and rebuked the fever; and it left her: and immediately she arose, and ministered unto them.*

HOWEVER much we may be beloved of God, we are not to expect an exemption from those troubles which are the common lot of humanity. Peter was one of the peculiar favourites of our Lord, and privileged to have more intimate access to him than almost any of the Apostles. Yet we find severe affliction in his family. This affliction however tended in the issue (as all the trials of God's children will) to the glory of God and to his own personal benefit. This observation naturally arises from the account which we have just read respecting the miraculous recovery of his wife's mother through the interposition of our Lord. In discoursing upon it we may notice,

I. The service which Jesus rendered her—

She was seized with a very dangerous disorder—

[Peter, an utter stranger to the doctrine since established in the church of Rome respecting the celibacy of the clergy, was a married man, and an eminent pattern both of filial piety and conjugal affection. The aged mother of his wife was permitted to spend her declining years with him: but her near

connexion with this eminent servant of God could not preserve her from the common calamities of life; nor could her son-in-law restore her by a miracle without an express commission from God himself^a. The circumstance of her being detained from the ordinances of God must doubtless have been a great additional trial to her mind, especially at a season, when he, who "spake as never man spake," had come thither to instruct the people^b. Peter however saw no necessity for staying from the synagogue when his mother was properly attended at home. He the rather went; and availed himself of his access to Jesus to intercede for his afflicted relative.]

At the request of Peter and his friends, Jesus restored her to perfect health—

[Jesus paid the same attention to the intercessions of friends as he did to men's personal applications. It was the delight of his soul to relieve misery wherever he found it. Nor did he think his work finished, when he had exercised his ministry in the house of God. He would not cease from labour while the continuance of his labours could be of any essential service. He could indeed have healed her by a word without going to her in person; but he delighted to visit the chambers of affliction. And behold! with what *condescension* he acted towards her; "he took her by the hand and lifted her up;" he, the Maker and Governor of the universe, administered unto her as if he had been her menial servant! Yet with what *authority* did he "rebuke" and dispel "the fever!" Who could act thus but God? Instantly did the disease vanish, and instantly did her former strength return; and universal joy succeeded to the tears of sympathy and compassion.]

In what manner she endeavoured to requite this favour we shall see by considering,

II. The service she rendered him—

We are not to estimate services by the intrinsic worth of them, so much as by the affection manifested in them. In this view her services were as acceptable as any that could be rendered; "she arose and

^a Perhaps the gift of miracles was not yet bestowed upon the church. But after it was, the Apostles could only exercise that gift when they were moved by God to do so. Why else did Paul leave Trophimus at Miletum sick (2 Tim. iv. 20.) or suffer the sickness of his dear fellow-labourer Epaphroditus to proceed to such extremity? (Phil. ii. 27.)

^b The loss of divine ordinances was that which David chiefly regretted when he fled from Absalom, Ps. lxxxiv. 1—3.

ministered unto them." By this conduct she unwittingly discovered,

1. The reality of the miracle—

[Had she merely joined her family, the departure of her fever might have been imputed to a fortunate coincidence of circumstances. Nor would they, who ascribed the expulsion of devils to the agency of Beelzebub, have been ashamed to adopt such a sentiment: but, if this had been the case, her body must have still continued in a state of debility; whereas she was able to exert herself as much as before her sickness. This then was an unquestionable proof of the reality of the miracle^c; and she became a witness for Jesus while she intended nothing more than to testify her love towards him.]

2. The goodness of her own heart—

[The hearts of all are, *strictly speaking*, most "desperately wicked." But our Lord tells us that "a *good man* out of the *good treasure* of his heart bringeth forth *good things*." In this sense she discovered much goodness of heart. So far from being puffed up with the favour conferred upon her, she was glad to execute the meanest offices. Her heart glowed with a desire to honour her benefactor: nor was she unmindful of the obligations she owed to those who had assisted her, or interceded for her. She ministered not to *him* only, but to "*them*" also. She rejoiced in an opportunity to testify her gratitude to all. How different was this from the conduct of the nine lepers^d! Who does not reprobate *them* as the basest of mankind? Whereas *she* did not delay one moment to testify her sense of the mercy vouchsafed unto her. The one thought of her heart was, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all the benefits he hath done unto me^e?" O that all were like-minded with her in performing a duty which is so "lovely and of such good report!"]

3. The duty of all who have received mercies from God—

[God is to be acknowledged as much in the blessing given to our food or medicine, as in the more *visible* effects of his miraculous interpositions. Have we then been preserved in health, or restored from sickness? Surely we stand indebted to God as much as if a miracle had been wrought in our behalf. And shall we be satisfied with making a few cold acknowledgments, and not render any active services to our benefactor? Or shall we pretend that there is nothing that we can do for him? Let us do what our capacity and situation enable us to do. However mean the service, it shall be accepted of him.

^c Matt. ix. 6—8.

^d Luke xvii. 17.

^e Ps. cxvi. 12.

But if we be too proud to stoop, or too idle to exert ourselves, we violate the plainest law of our nature, and render ourselves unworthy of the Christian name^f.]

The foregoing history may be IMPROVED,

1. In a way of reproof—

[There is not one of us who does not stand indebted to God for an infinite multitude of mercies. But in what manner have we requited him? Perhaps “in the time of trouble we have visited him, and poured out a prayer when his chastening was upon us^g.” But no sooner has his rod been removed, than, like metal from the furnace, we have returned to our former hardness. We have resembled the hypocritical Jews, and forgotten all the vows which we made in trouble^h. Ah! what a contrast between us and this pious matron! Let us be ashamed, and humble ourselves before God. Let us remember how awfully Hezekiah was punished for his ingratitudeⁱ. Let us instantly awake from our lethargy to the discharge of our duty, and “glorify Christ with our bodies and our spirits which are his.”]

2. In a way of consolation—

[Whether we go up to God’s house, or be confined on a bed of sickness, we may have access unto Jesus. He is with us at all times and in every place; and we may go to him with our petitions either for ourselves or others. What a rich source of consolation is this! And have we no disorders, bodily or spiritual, which need his aid? If our body be healthy, is not our soul languishing? Or if we ourselves be lively, have we no friend or relative that is in a sickly condition? Let us then apply to this almighty Physician, and we shall find him as condescending and as gracious as ever. He calls himself by this endearing name, “The Lord that healeth thee^k.” He will “send his word and heal us;” yea, he will strengthen us for the most active and difficult services. Let all of us then surround his throne, and cry with united voices, “Arise for our help, and redeem us for thy mercy’s sake^l.”]

^f Unthankfulness to God is specified as the summit of wickedness even in the heathen world, Rom. i. 21.

^g Isai. xxvi. 16. ^h Ps. lxxviii. 34—37. ⁱ 2 Chron. xxxii. 25.

^k Exod. xv. 26. ^l Ps. xlv. 26.

MCCCCXC.

THE DRAUGHT OF FISHES.

Luke v. 8—11. *When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man,*

O Lord. For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken: and so was also James and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon. And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not: from henceforth thou shalt catch men. And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him.

OUR blessed Lord from the time that he entered on his ministry, prosecuted it without intermission, preaching in the synagogues, and wherever the people were assembled to hear him. On the occasion before us, that he might not be obstructed by the populace that pressed upon him, he got into a small fishing vessel; and having pushed out a little from the land, addressed them to the greater advantage. The discourse he delivered is not recorded: but the miracle which he wrought immediately after it, is deserving of particular notice, and *that* in different points of view; I. As perverted by Peter—

Peter, and his partners James and John, had been engaged in fishing all the preceding night, and had caught nothing: but at our Lord's command they let down their nets, and inclosed such a multitude of fishes, that their nets began to break, and their ships, when filled with them, were almost ready to sink. Peter, overwhelmed with astonishment, saw that this was none other than the hand of God; and prostrating himself before the knees of Jesus, exclaimed, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!"

Now this was well meant on the part of Peter—

[He had a consciousness that he was "a sinful man;" and feared therefore that some heavy judgment would befall him in the presence of a holy God. Ever since Adam fled from the presence of Jehovah in Paradise, the presence of God has been rather a ground of fear and dread, than of hope and joy to fallen man. Manoah exclaimed to his wife, "We shall surely die, for we have seen God^a. This kind of apprehension it was which arose in the mind of Peter, and dictated his unwise request. If the circumstance of his being a sinful man was a reason why the Lord Jesus should depart from him, what person is there on the face of the whole earth that can desire his presence? — — —]

^a Judg. xiii. 22.

But his request should have been the very reverse of what it was—

[Was he a sinful man? he needed so much the more to receive instruction from the Saviour respecting the way which God had provided for his deliverance. He should rather have said, therefore, ‘Lord, I am a sinful man, and all my hope is in thee alone; for, “to whom else can I go either for mercy or for grace to help me in the time of need?” Thou alone canst bear with me; thou alone canst save me. My efforts to catch fish shew me how little I can do of myself even in the way of my trade: and how much less can I do in the things that relate to heaven! O, then, I entreat thee, never, never leave me; never, never forsake me; but be with me as my Guide and Comforter, my Righteousness and Strength, even unto the end. Without thee I can do nothing; but by strength communicated from thee I shall be able to do all things.’ Thus, instead of making his sinfulness a reason for entreating the Lord to depart from him, he should rather have urged it as a plea for mercy, saying, with David, “O Lord, for thy name’s sake, pardon mine iniquity; FOR it is GREAT^b.” This would have honoured the Saviour, whose mercy is equal to his power; and any other use of the miracle was, in fact, an ignorant and unbecoming perversion of it.]

The true intent of the miracle will appear, whilst we view it,

II. As explained by our blessed Lord—

He dissipates the fear of his trembling Disciple, saying to him, “Fear not;” and for his comfort assures him, that the miracle was designed as *an emblem*,

1. Of the effects which should be produced by the Gospel—

[The whole world is like the ocean, where sinners range without controul: and the Gospel is as a net, which the servants of the Lord spread in order to gather them for him, not that they may be destroyed, but that they may live under his protection, and be regarded by him as his peculiar possession. The prophets in their endeavours succeeded to a very limited extent: but the time was fast approaching, when the whole world, both of Jews and Gentiles, should be drawn to the Lord by the influence of his grace, and all nations be brought to the obedience of faith.” True indeed, both bad and good are gathered by the Gospel now, and are brought to an outward profession of the faith; a separation of the one from the other

^b Ps. xxv. 11.

being left to be made at the last day^c: but the scope of the miracle before us is rather to shew the saving effects of the Gospel, without adverting to any minute particulars respecting those in whom a difference shall be found.

And here let me remind you, that the emblem is now realized amongst you at this very hour. Whilst I preach to you the glad tidings of salvation through a crucified Redeemer, I am, in fact, spreading the Gospel net, that I may draw you from the midst of a wide and sinful world, and present you to God as a peculiar people, zealous of good works — — —]

2. Of the office to which Peter himself was now definitively called—

[Peter and his partners had followed our Lord before, but not so as to remain with him as his stated attendants. But now they were to abandon their worldly calling altogether, and to become exclusively the servants of his household: they were henceforth to be by profession, as it were, “fishers of men^d.” In this office Peter was to be pre-eminently distinguished: nor was either his apprehended sinfulness or his want of education to be any obstacle to his success. Accordingly the promise now given him was very fully accomplished in the first sermon which he preached on the day of Pentecost, when three thousand were converted to the faith of Christ. It was also again fulfilled, when he was made the honoured instrument of first opening the kingdom of heaven to the Gentile world, by the conversion of Cornelius and his company. From that time to the present hour the Gospel net has been cast with different measures of success in all the quarters of the globe: and we are looking for a period, not far distant now, when Pentecostal scenes shall be renewed in every place, and “all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”]

That the miracle may produce its full effects, let us contemplate it,

III. As to be improved by us—

See what it wrought on Peter and James and John: *this* is the effect it is to produce on us. We should all of us without exception be led by it,

1. To receive the Lord Jesus as the true Messiah—

[To his miracles the Lord Jesus himself appealed as demonstrative seals of his Divine commission. And what could convey clearer evidence of it than the miracle before us? For, whilst it did not admit of a possibility of collusion, it shewed how unbounded was the power of the Lord over the whole

^c Matt. xiii. 47—50.

^d Matt. iv. 19.

creation, and consequently how “competent he was to save to the uttermost all that should come unto God by him.” Whilst this proved that he was the true Messiah, it proved to our comfort, that all which he has undertaken for us shall surely be accomplished — — —]

2. To trust in him under all circumstances, however discouraging—

[Peter felt discouraged on account of his sinfulness; and he had seen his incompetency to effect any thing by any power of his own. Now the same grounds of discouragement often exist in reference to ourselves, whether as objects of the Lord’s mercy, or as agents in his service. But behold what the Lord effected both *for* him and *by* him in an instant of time: and can he not accomplish either for *us*, or by *us*, whatever shall be deemed conducive to his glory? Yes, he can, and will: our iniquities, if only we trust in him, shall be forgiven, and our wants of every kind shall be supplied: and through the communications of his grace we shall be made successful in all our efforts, whether to serve him ourselves, or to bring others to the enjoyment of his salvation — — —]

3. To serve and honour him with our whole hearts—

[These fishermen left their *all* to follow him. And this is what we also must do, in heart at least, and in act also, if fidelity to him require it: nor on any other terms than these will he acknowledge us as his disciples^e. And is he not worthy of being served thus? Did his Disciples ever find cause for regret that they had forsaken all for him^f? No: nor shall we. The Apostle Paul counted all things but loss for Christ: and thus must we hold in utter contempt every thing that may interfere with our duty to him, or impede us in his service — — — I call on all of you then to make this improvement of the miracle before us. For those who minister in holy things the duty is indispensable — — — nor is it less so for those who are ministered unto — — — To follow him fully is the sure way to enjoy his presence both in this world and in the world to come.]

^e Luke xiv. 33.

^f Luke xxii. 35.

MCCCCXCI.

THE CALL OF MATTHEW.

Luke v. 27—29. *After these things, he went forth, and saw a publican named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he said unto him, Follow me. And he left all, rose up, and followed him. And Levi made him a great feast in his own house.*

IF we notice particularly who they are whom God has more especially selected as objects of his grace and mercy, we shall be struck with this plain and obvious truth, that “God’s thoughts are not as our thoughts, nor his ways as our ways.” Had it been left to *man* to dispense the blessings of salvation, he would have imparted them to those whose previous qualifications and endowments seemed to have marked them out for this high distinction. But God has rather sought, by the preference which he has shewn, to magnify his own grace and mercy.

The person here chosen to the apostleship was a “publican.” Now the publicans were characters universally hated by the Jewish nation, because, as tax-gatherers, they aided the Roman government, by whom they were appointed, and whose interests they served. The persons who executed this office, knowing that, independently of their own character, they were hated and despised by their brethren, were intent only on advancing their own interests, and were guilty of exacting in many cases more than they were authorized to require; and thus by their oppressive conduct they rendered the office, and all who held it, objects of unqualified reprobation. Yet of these persons did God select many, in preference to the Scribes and Pharisees, to participate the benefits of the Redeemer’s kingdom; as our blessed Lord himself says, “The publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you^a.” The person whom our text mentions as executing that office, is here called “Levi:” but in his own account which he gives of himself, he calls himself by the name of Matthew^b. Of his conversion we are informed in the words before us. He was “sitting at the receipt of custom,” in the regular discharge of his duty, and, without any previous intimation or instruction, was called by our blessed Lord to a constant attendance upon him, as one of his Disciples. This event will be found deeply interesting to us all, whilst we consider,

^a Matt. xxi. 31.

^b Matt. ix. 9.

I. His unexpected call—

In this there was doubtless somewhat peculiar. He was called to an office which was limited to twelve, and which now no longer exists. But still, excepting that peculiarity,

1. The same call is given to every one of us—

[To us the Gospel speaks in the same authoritative tone as that in which Jesus addressed this busy publican: and in it the Lord Jesus Christ himself says to every one of us, "Follow me." 'Believe in me as the true Messiah: receive me as sent of God to be the Saviour of your soul: give yourself up to me as your Lord and Master: obey my commandments, and tread in my steps. Let no present considerations operate to retard your compliance with my will: come, leave all, and follow me.' In all this there is nothing peculiar: it is the duty of every living man: the command is issued equally to all: "If any man will be my Disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me"— — —]

2. Wherever it is effectual, it is equally the gift of sovereign grace—

[To Matthew, the call came unexpected and unsought: and so it does in reality wherever it takes effect. The precise time of its operation may not, in all cases, be so distinctly seen, nor its power so deeply felt; but in all cases must its efficacy be traced to God, who, of his own good pleasure, dispenses his gifts to whomsoever he will. There may in some cases be a long season of gradual illumination, even as the early dawn, whose transition from darkness to light is imperceptibly progressive: but still, if we trace it to the first thought and first desire originating in the soul, we must without hesitation ascribe it altogether to God, who "gives both to will and to do of his good pleasure^c." Of all true converts it must be said, "Ye have not chosen me; but I have chosen you^d:" "You loved me, because I first loved you^e:" You did not "know me, till after you were known of me^f;" or "apprehend me, till you had first been apprehended by me^g." In reference to you all it must in this sense be said, no less than of St. Matthew himself, "I am found of them that sought me not; I am made manifest to them that asked not after me^h." Whatever "holy desires we feel, or good counsels we follow, or just works we perform," they all, as our Liturgy informs us, "proceed from

^c Phil. ii. 13.

^d John xv. 16.

^e 1 John iv. 19.

^f Gal. iv. 9.

^g Phil. iii. 12.

^h Isai. lxxv. 1.

God;” who, as our Tenth Article states it, “by his grace in Christ Jesus *prevents us*, that we may have a good will, and worketh with us when we have that good will.”]

That this call of Matthew may have its due effect upon us, let us consider,

II. His exemplary obedience to it—

As in the call itself, so in his obedience to it, there was somewhat peculiar. The office which he had held, he instantly resigned, (committing it no doubt to proper hands,) and became from that moment a stated attendant on our Lord. In this respect it is not necessary that we should follow him, unless the occupation in which we have been engaged be criminal. We are rather to “abide in the calling in which we have been called:” yea, “therein to abide with Godⁱ.” But in other respects our obedience must resemble his. It should be,

1. Prompt—

[There was in him no “conferring with flesh and blood.” Elisha, when Elijah’s mantle was cast upon him^k, felt an irresistible attraction, and obeyed without hesitation or delay. So it should be with us. Does the Lord Jesus by his word and Spirit command us to follow him? We should not wait for a second call: we should so act, that we may be able to say with David, “I made haste and delayed not to keep thy commandments^l” — — —]

2. Self-denying—

[Lucrative as his situation was, Matthew resigned it without reluctance, determining that nothing should obstruct him in the path of his duty. And should not we also despise all earthly gains or prospects in comparison of Christ? Should we not be ready to shake them from us, as we would “the thick clay from our feet” when we were about to run a race^m? — — — Yes verily, we should be ready to “leave all to follow Christ;” and account not even life itself dear to us, if only we may honour him by the sacrifice of itⁿ — — —]

3. Grateful—

[Immediately Matthew made a great feast for his divine Master, and invited to it a number of his former friends, who

ⁱ 1 Cor. vii. 20, 24.

^k 1 Kings xix. 19—21.

^l Ps. cxix. 60.

^m Hab. ii. 6.

ⁿ Acts xx. 24. Phil. i. 20.

were still prosecuting the line which he had just relinquished. In this he sought to honour his Lord in the face of the whole world, and to advance the interests of His kingdom, by bringing others to the knowledge of him. This, under any circumstances, was a just expression of his gratitude for the mercy vouchsafed unto him. And it shews us how we also should use our influence, when once we have become followers of our blessed Lord. We should not only not be ashamed to confess him openly before men, but should exert ourselves to bring our friends and relatives to an acquaintance with him, that they also may be made monuments of his grace, and become partakers of the blessings which we enjoy. Our very feasts should now be ordered with that view, and be made conducive to that end. Nor should we make any account of either expense or trouble, if we may but testify in the smallest degree our love to Christ, or advance the ends for which he came into the world — — —]

4. Determined—

[We never read of his expressing a wish afterwards to return to his former employment, or of his regretting that he had made so great a sacrifice. Nor should we ever “look back, after having once put our hand to the plough^o.” The patriarchs, who had left their country and their kindred at the call of God, “had opportunities enough to return, if they had been so minded;” but they “looked forward to a heavenly country^p,” and to their dying hour pursued their pilgrimage towards it with unabated ardour. And we also must go forward in a sweet and assured hope, that in the place of all that we resign or lose for Christ, we shall have “a better and an enduring substance in heaven^q” — — —]

REFLECT,

1. How strongly does this example reprove the whole Christian world!

[We are all called as he was, and have been called ten thousand times, to serve and follow Christ. But on whom amongst us have the same effects been produced? Who has not had many excuses to offer for declining to accept the invitations of his Lord? — — — I may even say, who, if his own friend or relative had acted as Matthew did, would not have been ready to cry out against him as a weak deluded enthusiast? But this call must be obeyed, if ever we would be acknowledged by our Lord as his obedient people. I do not say that we must *actually renounce* all our worldly interests for Christ; but this I say, that *we must be ready to renounce* them, if they interfere with our duty to him, or if by the surrender of them

^o Luke ix. 62.

^p Heb. xi. 15, 16.

^q Heb. x. 34.

we may more advance his glory in the world. On no other terms will he receive us: if we be not willing to “lose father and mother, and houses and lands, yea, and our own lives also for his sake, we cannot be his disciples.” O that his power might now go forth amongst you, as it did in the case before us; and that all your “souls may be subdued to the obedience of faith!”]

2. How great is the benefit of obeying the Gospel call!

[Matthew in appearance was degraded and impoverished; but he was made an eminent servant of Christ, and a blessed instrument of diffusing the knowledge of him through the whole world. (Of all the Evangelists, not one marks so fully the Messiahship of Jesus, and the accomplishment of prophecy in him, as he.) And what is his condition now? Has he not far better treasures than ever he possessed on earth? Know ye then, that you also may appear to suffer loss by devoting yourselves to Christ; but if you have the honour of being his servants, his friends, his heirs; if he acknowledge you as members of his own body, yea, as his spouse, who shall participate all his glory, and have the everlasting fruition of his love; you have made a good exchange. Rejoice then in your high privileges; and be thankful to Him, by whose almighty power alone you have been made willing to accept them; and let your whole lives be henceforth consecrated, as Matthew’s was, to his service: so shall you in your place be his witnesses to all around you; and ere long be joined to that blessed society, where every loss shall be compensated with a proportionable weight of glory.]

MCCCCXCII.

THE NEW WINE AND OLD BOTTLES.

Luke v. 36—38. *And he spake also a parable unto them; No man putteth a piece of new garment upon an old; if otherwise, then both the new maketh a rent, and the piece that was taken out of the new agreeth not with the old. And no man putteth new wine into old bottles; else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottles shall perish. But new wine must be put into new bottles; and both are preserved.*

THE cavils of objectors have been frequently overruled for the benefit of the church. They have given rise to many of our Lord’s most instructive discourses.

and thereby furnished us with a much clearer and more extensive knowledge of our duty. Thrice in this chapter do we see our Lord called upon to answer the objections that were either secretly entertained, or openly expressed, against him. His forgiving of sins, and associating with sinners, had given offence ; but he vindicated his conduct with respect to both, and has afforded us herein a rich discovery of his power and grace. In the context he was condemned for leaving his Disciples so much at liberty respecting the duty of fasting. In reply to the queries put to him on this subject, he delivered the parables which we have now read : and in which are contained,

I. A virtual acknowledgment of the duty of fasting—

[This duty, together with the attendant offices of humiliation and prayer, our Lord had forborne to insist upon so much as John had done : and for that he was blamed by the self-righteous Pharisees. But in his answer to the question put to him, he does not say, that the children of the bride-chamber were *never* to fast, but only not during the present season, “ whilst the Bridegroom was yet with them.” Nor in the parables before us does he say, that the old garment should *not* be mended, nor the wine put into vessels *at all*, but only that discretion was to be exercised with respect to the manner of doing these things. These intimations alone were sufficient to establish the propriety of practising the duty there spoken of : but they are enforced by many other passages of Holy Writ ; and especially by the admonitions given by our Lord himself respecting our conduct when we fast^a. Indeed, in our text itself he says, that after his removal from them “ they should fast^b.”]

There being no doubt amongst us on this point, I proceed more particularly to notice that which is in fact the substance of both the parables, namely,

II. A special direction for the performance of this duty—

In inculcating or practising this solemn duty, we are here taught to pay the strictest attention to the principal circumstances relating to it, such as the *time*, the *manner*, the *end*.

1. The time—

^a Matt. vi. 16—18.

^b ver. 35.

[It is not *every* season that is suited to this duty. At a wedding-feast, for instance, it would be absurd to fast. But on occasion of any great calamity, whether public or private, a fit opportunity would offer itself. In a season of war, famine, pestilence, the deepest humiliation becomes us. So under the pressure of any personal affliction, and especially in a time of spiritual distress, when corruptions are strong, and temptations powerful, and self-reproach is deep, and God has hidden his face from us, it becomes us to betake ourselves to fasting and prayer. Respecting an unclean devil, which the Disciples were not able to eject, our Lord said, "This kind goeth not out but by fasting and prayer^c." And so we find on many occasions our lusts too strong for us; and *therefore* too strong, *because* we use not these means of obtaining the victory over them. There are also in domestic life seasons when husband and wife may profitably separate from each other for a short time in order to address themselves more effectually to the discharge of this high duty of fasting and prayer^d. And thus has Solomon informed us; "There is a time to weep, as well as a time to laugh, and a time to mourn as well as a time to dance^e:" and these seasons we ought more particularly to select, even "when the Bridegroom is taken away from us."]

2. The manner—

[Here also discretion is greatly wanted. To carry our austerities so far as to injure our own health, is highly inexpedient. Such conduct, instead of fitting us the more for the Lord's service, would rather incapacitate us for it, and defeat the very object we had in view. The putting of new wine into *leathern* bottles that were weakened by use and age, would lead to the destruction of the bottles themselves, and of the wine committed to them. And so would indiscreet austerities operate on us, and on all around us. For, what would the world at large think of a religion that prescribed such things? Would they not cry out against it as a gloomy superstition? And what would an inquiring soul be ready to feel? Would he not be discouraged and disheartened, and, through a distaste for such self-tormenting exercises, be ready to relinquish it altogether? We must take care then, that in our mode of inculcating these self-denying duties, we do not give occasion for such unfounded sentiments, and such erroneous conceptions.]

3. The end—

[The Pharisees put these services in the place of true religion, not knowing that they are only as means to an end, and as the scaffolding to the edifice which it is employed to construct. Hence arose their bitter complaint against our

^c Matt. xvii. 21.

^d 1 Cor. v. 7.

^e Eccl. iii. 4.

Lord. But we must ever remember, that, to whatever extent we multiplied these services, they never could stand in the place of repentance, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the great error of the Church of Rome: they place *penance*, that is, *a round of observances prescribed by man*, in the place of repentance as enjoined by God, and in the place also of the Lord Jesus Christ, “whose blood alone can cleanse from all sin.” But I charge you before God to be on your guard against this, since it will “make void the whole Gospel of Christ,” and cause “the blood of Christ to have been shed in vain.” As a discipline for the mortifying of the flesh and the quickening of the spirit, fasting is good: but as a substitute for an entire renovation of soul, and for a simple faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, it is a broken reed, which will pierce even unto death the hand that rests upon it.]

LEARN then from this parable,

1. To judge with candour—

[The Pharisees through their pride and ignorance were led to condemn our Lord. And thus we also are apt to judge our unoffending brethren. We have a standard of our own; and by that we try all other persons: and, if they exceed that standard we condemn them as enthusiasts; or, if they fall short of it, we account them but lukewarm formalists. But the same standard cannot be applied to all. There are ten thousand circumstances which may not only justify a difference of conduct in pious persons, but may actually produce it. The Disciples of John, we readily acknowledge, did right in fasting oft: but did the Disciples of our Lord act wrong because they did not fast at all? No: the circumstances of the two parties were widely different, as our Lord informed them; and therefore both were right. So it may be with many of our brethren, who differ from us in relation to this matter: and it does not become us to judge them. “To their own Master they stand or fall:” and it is our part to commit them altogether unto God, who judgeth righteously, and who alone can estimate every thing which is to be taken into the account.]

2. To give advice with caution—

[We ought to bear in mind the different situations and capacities of men, and not to be requiring of novices what is suited only to the strength of an established saint. Our blessed Lord spake not all he knew, but only what his hearers were able to receive; and even from his own Disciples he kept back much which they were not able at that time to comprehend. So St. Paul “fed his Corinthian converts with milk

† John xvi. 12.

and not with meat," because they were yet in too carnal a state to enter into the deeper subjects which he would gladly have brought before them^g. Thus then should we also do. We should "feed babes with milk, and minister meat to those only who by reason of a more adult age are able to digest it^h." Nor let any one think this unbecoming a minister of God. It is the true and proper office of love. Jacob would not drive his lambs too far, lest in one day he should kill them allⁱ. And our blessed Lord "carried the lambs in his bosom, and gently led those that were with young." And thus must we also exercise the same tender care in administering to the lambs of our flock, lest by undue rigour we "break the bruised reed," or by overwhelming exactions we "quench the smoking flax."]

3. To press forward with holy unremitting diligence—

[It was of his holy Apostles that our Lord said, that in the days after his removal from them they should fast. Who then are *we* that *we* should think ourselves at liberty to remit our exertions in our heavenly course? Never will there be in this life a moment when our vigilance can be dispensed with, or our most self-denying labours be relaxed. Nor, if St. Paul was "in fastings often," should we account that holy discipline unnecessary for *us*. On the contrary, we should by all possible means "keep our body under and bring it into subjection, lest by any means, after having ministered to others, we ourselves should be deemed unworthy the approbation of our God^k.]

^g 1 Cor. iii. 2.

^h Heb. v. 12—14.

ⁱ Gen. xxxiii. 13.

^k 1 Cor. ix. 27.

MCCCCXCIII.

THE APOSTLES CHOSEN.

Luke vi. 12, 13. *And it came to pass in those days that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, he called unto him his Disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named Apostles.*

THE short period of our Lord's ministry on earth rendered it expedient for him to employ others as his co-adjutors in the work. Accordingly, in reference to the twelve Patriarchs, who might be considered as the fathers of the Jewish Church, he selected twelve

of his Disciples, who should be his instruments for planting and establishing his Church. There were other seventy, whom at a later period he sent forth, two and two, for the purpose of preparing the minds of the people for his personal ministry among them^a; but the Apostles were to be his stated servants after that he should have left this world and returned to his heavenly Father. The circumstances of their appointment were peculiar, and deserve our most attentive consideration. The night previous to their appointment he spent in prayer to his heavenly Father^b: which remarkable occurrence it will be proper to notice in a threefold view:

I. As an act for our benefit—

The appointment of the Apostles was a work of singular importance—

[They were to be employed in the Church as his messengers to declare his truth—his witnesses to attest it—as patterns also to illustrate—and as martyrs to confirm it. But whence could a number of poor fishermen attain “a sufficiency for these things?” — —]

Hence our blessed Lord continued the whole night in prayer for them—

[His heavenly Father was able to furnish them for this great work, and to give them success in it; and therefore our Lord importunately sought for them the grace which they stood in need of: nor would he cease from his exertions, till he had obtained all that their necessities required. The benefit of his prayer was fully manifested as soon as they were endued with power from on high: then nothing could withstand their wisdom, or subdue their courage: they were deaf to menaces, and regardless of death. Their success was rapid, extensive, permanent: and we at this day enjoy the fruits of their labours. Through that prayer the Apostles were richly furnished unto every good work; and were enabled so to establish the kingdom of our Lord, that neither earth nor hell have ever been able to prevail against it.]

II. As a lesson for our instruction—

The ordination of ministers is also a most important work—

^a Luke x. 1.

^b If we suppose *προσευχῆ* to mean “in a place of prayer,” we still can have no doubt what his occupation there was.

[On them, under God, depends the everlasting welfare of thousands. We need only compare the state of those congregations where the Gospel is faithfully preached with those which are under the superintendence of careless ministers: in the one will be found little but ignorance and irreligion; in the other, there will be many whose minds are enlightened with divine truth, and whose souls are quickened to a new and heavenly life.

But where shall persons be found duly qualified for the work—where those who will be willing to undertake it? True; if the ministry of the word be made a source of temporal emolument, there will be multitudes ready to engage in it: but if the “signs of a minister,” or accompaniments of the ministry, be like those in the Apostles’ days, “reproaches, necessities, and distresses for Christ’s sake^c,” and the only *pluralities* be “labours, stripes, prisons, deaths^d,” there will not be many candidates for the office, nor will the qualifications for it be thought so common as they are at present. How few are ready to go and preach to the heathen, where the labour and self-denial are great, and the earthly recompence is small! Large benefices, where little is to be done, or the work can be done by proxy, are caught up with avidity: but if nothing but a future reward be held forth, and God say, “Who will go for us?” there are few indeed that will answer with the prophet, “Here am I, send me^e.”]

This, therefore, should be the subject of our devoutest prayers—

[God himself has commanded us to commit the matter to him in prayer: “The harvest truly is plenteous, and the labourers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth (*thrust out*^f) labourers into his harvest.” And truly, all ranks and orders of men are concerned to “labour earnestly in prayer” concerning it.

How fervently should *they* pray, to whom the office of ordaining others is committed! for “if they lay hands suddenly on any man, they make themselves partakers of other men’s sins^g.” Nor should *they* be less earnest *who are to be ordained*. When we consider how arduous their work is, and how great their responsibility before God; when we reflect that their word will be “a savour of life to the life and salvation of many, or a savour of death to their death” and condemnation^h; and that the blood of all that perish through their neglect will be required at their hands; methinks it is a wonder that any one can be found, who, for the sake of filthy lucre, will dare to undertake it. Were the weight of the office duly considered,

^c 2 Cor. xii. 10, 12. ^d 2 Cor. xi. 23—28. ^e Isai. vi. 8.

^f ἰκρῶλα, Matt. ix. 37, 38. ^g 1 Tim. v. 22. ^h 2 Cor. ii. 16.

no one would presume to enter upon it without much prayer to God to qualify him for the discharge of it, and to bless his labours to the edification of the people.

But *the people themselves also* are no less concerned to pray, that God would “send them pastors after his own heart;” for the welfare of their souls essentially depends on the kind of ministry which they attend: if Christ be not exhibited to them in his person and offices; if they be not encouraged to receive out of his fulness all the blessings of salvation; if they be not led into discoveries of the evil of their own hearts, and instructed in the nature of that change which the Holy Spirit will effect within them; if, in short, they have not “the whole counsel of God set before them,” they will be left to rest in very low attainments, if not to “perish utterly through lack of knowledge.”

This lesson then should be learned by all; and so learned, as to be reduced to practice.]

III. As a pattern for our imitation—

Prayer is both the duty and the privilege of all—

[Our blessed Lord had doubtless more intimate communion with his Father than we can possibly have; yet are we also authorized to call God “our Father;” yea, we are commanded to do it, and to “open our mouths wide, that he may fill them.” It is not, indeed, required of us that we should spend whole nights in prayer to God; for that would probably, unless in some very peculiar circumstances, render us unfit for prosecuting the duties of the ensuing day: but we are required to “continue in prayer, and to watch thereunto with thanksgivingⁱ :” and the more nearly we can approach to the example of our blessed Lord in the frequency and urgency of our prayers^k, the more remarkable will be the answers that we shall receive, and the more abundant the communications of God to our souls. If we wrestled more like Jacob, we should certainly prevail to a much greater extent than in general we do^l.]

We should therefore resort to it on every particular emergency—

[Though the particular object of our Lord’s continuance in prayer does not occur to us, yet we all have some occasions that call for more than ordinary direction and assistance from God. On these occasions, whatever they may be, whether they relate to the body or the soul, to time or to eternity, we should go and spread our wants before God. His own command to us is, “In *every* thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.”

ⁱ Col. iv. 2. ^k Ps. xxii. 2. Heb. v. 7. ^l Gen. xxxii. 24—26.

“In *all* our ways we must acknowledge him, and he will direct our paths.”

In this then must all of us resemble the Lord Jesus Christ. In this has “he set us an example, that we should follow his steps:” and “we must walk as he walked.” By this must all his followers be distinguished; for they are “a people near unto him.” They are hypocrites, of whom it is said, “They will not always call upon God:” all true Christians can say, “Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.”]

APPLICATION—

[Learn hence the real state of your souls before God. Prayer has often been called the pulse of the soul: and truly it is so; for by that you may discern the state of the soul, incomparably better than you can by the pulse the state of the body. If you are prayerless people, you are dead, altogether dead in trespasses and sins. If your prayers are habitually cold and formal, they are such as God will never accept. No prayer will enter into the ears of the Lord of Hosts, but that which is offered “in spirit and in truth.” Let us then beg of God to give us a spirit of grace and of supplication; and let us interest ourselves with God for the welfare of his Church. Let us especially remember “those who are over us in the Lord,” and “labour always fervently for them in prayer,” that they may be enabled to fulfil their ministry with diligence and success. Thus shall we both ensure blessings to our own souls, and be instrumental to the hastening on of that day, when “all shall know the Lord, from the least to the greatest,” and “all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”]

MCCCCXCIV.

THE ANALOGY BETWEEN BODILY AND SPIRITUAL CURES.

Luke vi. 19. *And the whole multitude sought to touch him: for there went virtue out of him, and healed them all.*

IN perusing the histories of ancient heroes, we may often be led to admire their skill and valour; but we shall much oftener be shocked at the means they used to exalt and aggrandize themselves; and, when we see them raising trophies to themselves on the ruins of slaughtered nations, we shall be induced to consider them rather as the plagues and scourges of mankind. But how different will be our sensations, when we

read the history of Jesus! There we shall meet with nothing which will not be delightful to a benevolent mind. If we trace him in his circuits through the country, and view in every place the objects that surround him, we shall behold at one time the eyes he has just now opened, gazing on him with wonder and amazement; and at another time the ears he has unstopped, drinking in his words with insatiable eagerness and attention. *Here* we shall behold the hands he has restored to use, stretched forth to proclaim his praises; and the feet he has strengthened, leaping and dancing round him with inexpressible delight: *there* we shall hear the tongues he has loosed, shouting with exquisite love and gratitude; and see those whom he has dispossessed of devils, sitting with composure at the feet of their Benefactor. Sometimes we shall see the very dead starting forth into life and vigour at his command, and either rapturously saluting their disconsolate relations, or rending the air with their acclamations and hosannas. Such accounts as these, if considered only in a temporal view, cannot but excite in us a sympathetic joy, and afford the most pleasing sensations: but, no doubt, they were intended also to convey some spiritual instruction; in which view they acquire an additional, and almost an infinite, importance. Perhaps it may be too much to say that the miracles, wrought by our Lord, were *types* of the spiritual blessings he conveys; but we may affirm without hesitation, that there is a very strong analogy between them: and therefore, when we see what he did to the bodies of men, we have, at least, a very just occasion of considering what he will do for our souls.

In this view we propose to consider the account given us in the chapter before us. We are informed that a great multitude came to him out of Judæa and Jerusalem, and from the sea coast of Tyre and Sidon, to hear him, and to be healed of their diseases: and then it is said, in the words of the text, "The whole multitude sought to touch him: for there went virtue out of him, and healed them all."

To illustrate this subject we shall,

I. Trace the analogy between the miracles wrought by our blessed Lord on the bodies of men, and those which he yet works on men's souls—

For the more distinct elucidation of this point, we may observe,

1. There is resemblance between *the disorders of the body*, and the disorders of the soul—

[Many were brought to our Lord, who were blind, deaf, leprous, and possessed with devils. And such are men at this time, in a spiritual view. Like the Laodiceans, however they may “think themselves rich and increased with goods, they are wretched and miserable, and poor, and *blind*; and therefore need to take counsel of our Lord, and to anoint their eyes with his eye-salve, that they may see^a.” “Their eyes must be opened, before they will turn from the power of Satan unto God^b.”

The natural man too is represented as spiritually *deaf*; as having ears, and not hearing^c; as being unable to hear the voice of the good Shepherd^d; yea, as like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ear^e.

The *leprosy* also of sin lies deep in our hearts; as the prophet intimates, when, in allusion to the convicted leper, he says of himself, and of all around him, “Woe is me, I am a man of unclean lips, and dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips^f.”

Though demoniacal possessions were not properly disorders, yet are they always enumerated with them, when the miracles of our Lord are recited. And, however humiliating the truth may be, it is certain that we are all, while in an unconverted state, *possessed by Satan*. The unbelieving world are blinded^g, governed^h, and led captive by him at his willⁱ. And, whatever evil they are excited to commit, it is through the instigation of that wicked fiend^k.]

2. There is a resemblance between *the cures wrought by our Lord upon the bodies of men*, and the cures which he will work upon their souls—

[Wherever *the blessings of salvation are mentioned in the prophets*, they are set forth in some highly figurative *expressions*; and by none more commonly than by those *relating to bodily cures*. Isaiah says, “In that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind see out of

^a Rev. iii. 17, 18.

^b Acts xxvi. 18.

^c Matt. xiii. 15.

^d John viii. 47.

^e Ps. lviii. 4.

^f Isai. vi. 5.

^g 2 Cor. iv. 4.

^h Eph. ii. 2.

ⁱ 2 Tim. ii. 26.

^k John xiii. 27. Acts v. 3.

obscurity and out of darkness^l." And again, "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped: then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing^m;" which figures are afterwards explained as relating to the *spiritual* salvation of the Churchⁿ.

The application which the inspired Apostles make of these prophecies further evinces the truth of our position. St. Matthew quotes a passage, which beyond all doubt relates to spiritual benefits that were to be obtained through the death of Christ, and explains it, *in a way of accommodation*, as referring to the bodily cures which our Lord had wrought^o. Further, *our Lord himself*, having healed a blind man, *takes occasion to trace this very analogy* between the spiritual blindness of the Pharisees, and the bodily blindness which he had just healed: "For judgment I am come into this world, that they who see not might see, and that they who see might be made blind^p." And both the answer which the Pharisees made to him, and the reply which our Lord gave them, manifest that this analogy was intended to be pointed out^q.]

3. There is a resemblance between *the manner in which the diseased persons applied* to our Lord for healing, and the manner in which we should apply to him for spiritual healing—

[Of all the multitudes that came to our Lord, there was not one who was not *sensible of his disease*. Moreover, they all came to him with *deep humility*, prostrating themselves before him in the most abject manner^r, and acknowledging the utter insufficiency of all other means^s. And such was *their earnestness*, that they came from afar^t, and could not be prevailed upon to hold their peace^u, nor would take a denial even from our Lord himself^x. It is worthy of notice also, that they all came *in faith*: some few indeed doubted his power, and some his willingness, to help them: but none doubted both his power and his willingness; and the greater part entertained no doubt at all.

Thus then should we go to him, "weary and heavy-laden" with our sins, and so *sensible of our spiritual wants*, that if he should ask us, What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee? we may answer him immediately, "Lord, that this disorder may be healed, and that sin forgiven^y." We must also, with all

^l Isai. xxix. 18. and xxxii. 3.

^m Isai. xxxv. 5, 6.

ⁿ Isai. xxxv. 10.

^o Compare Isai. liii. 4. with Matt. viii. 16, 17.

^p John ix. 39. ^q John ix. 40, 41. ^r Luke viii. 28, 41.

^s Mark v. 26, 33. ^t Mark viii. 3. ^u Matt. xx. 30, 31.

^x Matt. xv. 22—28. ^y Matt. xx. 33.

lowliness of mind, confess our inability to obtain relief from any other quarter, and our dependence on him alone^z. Moreover, in proof of our *earnestness*, we must not merely seek, but strive^a, determining to take the kingdom of heaven by violence^b, and not to let the Saviour go, except he bless us^c. Lastly, we must be sure to exercise *faith* on Christ, believing him both able and willing to save us: for we are expressly told that, he who wavereth and is of a doubtful mind, must not expect to receive any thing of the Lord^d.]

4. There is a resemblance between *the manner in which our Lord cured* their disorders and the manner in which he will cure ours—

[He sometimes healed the people *secretly*, as when he took the deaf man aside from the multitude, and put his fingers into his ears, and said, Ephphatha, be opened, and then charged him to tell no man^e. So he has now many “*hidden ones*,” in whose hearts he carries on a secret work, and heals them without attracting the notice of the world. At other times he performed the cures *openly*, and in the sight of all; as when he bade the man with the withered hand to stand forth^f. So he often converts the souls of profligate sinners, or bitter persecutors, in such a striking manner, as to fill all around them with wonder and amazement.

Sometimes he wrought his cures *instantaneously*; as in the man at the pool of Bethesda^h: and so he effects a sudden change in the hearts of many, causing them to cry out like the first converts and the jailor, “What shall I do to be saved?” At other times he performed his cures *gradually*, as in the blind man, who at first saw men, as trees, walking^k: and so he often carries on his work in a gradual manner in our souls, leading us from progressive conviction to thorough conversion.

Sometimes he *used means* in curing them; as when he put clay and spittle on the blind man’s eyes^l: so he now converts many by the preaching of his Gospel. At other times he used *no means*, as in the case of the ten lepers, who were cleansed as they were going in the way^m: and so he often imparts the knowledge of himself by the teachings of his Spirit, without using any particular means or instrument to convey it.

But however varied his manner was with respect to these things, in one respect it was uniformly the same: whomsoever he cured, he cured *perfectly*: and thus he always carries on the

^z Hos. xiv. 1—3.

^a Luke xiii. 24.

^b Matt. xi. 12.

^c Gen. xxxii. 26.

^d Jam. i. 6, 7.

^e Mark vii. 34, 36.

^f Ps. lxxxiii. 3.

^g Matt. iii. 3, 5.

^h John v. 8.

ⁱ Acts ii. 37. and xvi. 30.

^k Mark viii. 24.

^l John ix. 6.

^m Luke xvii. 14.

work he has begun in the souls of menⁿ, and perfects that which concerneth them^o.]

Since then, without any forced interpretations or conceits, we may draw such instruction from the miracles in general, let us endeavour to,

II. Improve the particular miracle recorded in the text—

If, in the concerns of our souls, we desire either *direction* or *encouragement*, we cannot find them any where more suitably afforded than in the passage before us; where the conduct of the multitude suggests *the former*, and the conduct of Jesus *the latter*. Let us then improve it,

1. For direction—

[We should not dare to exhort you in general to follow the multitude; since that would be to lead you in the broad road to destruction^p. But in the present instance we say, Follow *that* multitude.

Follow them *in the conviction which they had of their own need of Christ*. Every one felt within himself that he laboured under a disorder which needed healing; and, if each of them had been asked, ‘What is your disorder? and what is yours?’ they could all have specified the principal symptoms of the disorders under which they laboured. Now thus must we go to Jesus, feeling and lamenting the ravages which sin has made upon our souls. It is not sufficient for us to confess in general that we are sinners; we must open our case to him, and tell him, “Thus and thus have I done^q.” And, if the Spirit of God have truly convinced us of sin, we shall find no more difficulty in this, than a poor man does in opening his complaints to a physician. More particularly, we should get our hearts impressed with the evil of our *besetting* sin; and, carrying it to Jesus, we should confess it, lament it, aggravate it, and implore both his mercy to pardon it, and his grace to subdue it: and, if we thus go to him labouring and heavy-laden, we have his promise that he will give us rest^r.

Follow them also *in their earnestness*. We are told that the people pressed on Jesus, so that they who were nearest to him could not maintain their place by reason of the multitudes, who strove to get access to him, and to touch him^s. They not only left their own business, but, in many instances, prevailed on their friends to relinquish their occupations also, in order to carry them to Jesus. In short, they postponed every

ⁿ Phil. i. 6.

^o Ps. cxxxviii. 8.

^p Matt. vii. 13.

^q Josh. vii. 20.

^r Matt. xi. 28.

^s Mark iii. 10.

consideration to that of obtaining a cure from him. And who could blame them? They felt their need of healing, and knew that they might obtain it by going to him, and therefore they would on no account lose the opportunity afforded them: and, when they could in no other way get access to him, they would go up to the top of the house, and let down their diseased friends in a couch through the tiling[†]. Would to God that we were all thus earnest for the salvation of our souls! that no consideration whatever were suffered to detain us from the Lord! and that not one of us might delay another hour to go unto him! We are far more favourably circumstanced than they were, since we can go to him without removing from our chamber, or intermitting our earthly business. He is every where present to heal us; if we can only break through the crowd of lusts and cares that are within our own hearts, there is no other crowd that can keep us from him. How anxious should we be to get immediate relief from an acute disorder, especially if there were but one physician able to heal us, and his continuance in our neighbourhood were likely to be very short! Let us then shew the same care for our souls, and go to Jesus without delay, knowing that "this is the accepted time, this is the day of salvation."

Once more—Follow them *in their faith*. They were not only convinced of Christ's power and willingness to heal them, but were assured that, if they could but touch his garment, they should be whole[‡]. They did not stand reasoning about the matter, or go and try other means, but applied to him as their all-sufficient helper. So must we go to him, not endeavouring first to heal ourselves by our repentance, or labouring to make ourselves fit for him by our amendments, or questioning whether he be willing to receive us: we must go to him just as we are, altogether filthy and abominable; and be firmly persuaded that we shall not seek his face in vain. To be reasoning and yielding to doubts and fears will be of little avail; but to go to Christ in faith, will prove an infallible remedy for every ill: whatever be our complaint, he will say, "Go thy way; and, as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee;" and we shall be made whole from that very hour[§].]

2. For encouragement—

[We cannot conceive any thing more encouraging than the behaviour of our blessed Lord to the people.

Behold his *condescension*! How wonderful was it, that he, the Lord of glory, should suffer such a multitude of miserable and filthy objects to press upon him! yea, that he should go about through all cities, towns, and villages, for that very

[†] Luke v. 19.

[‡] Matt. ix. 21.

[§] Matt. viii. 13.

purpose! And will he now be inattentive to our spiritual wants? When we rush, as it were, with holy violence into his presence, and seek to touch him, will he forbid us? Will he withdraw himself from us, or say, 'Stand off; thou art too vile to be admitted to my presence?' Has he not said, on the contrary, that "whosoever cometh unto him, he will in no wise cast out?" Let the trembling sinner then take courage; for his sighing shall soon be turned into that triumphant song, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless *his* holy name, who forgiveth all thy sins, and healeth all thy diseases^z!"

Behold also his *compassion*! There was not one of all the multitudes that came to him, dismissed without a cure. Though many of them probably had despised him, and though he foresaw that many of those very persons would join in that general cry, "Away with him, crucify him, crucify him!" (as it is highly probable they did) yet his bowels of compassion yearned over them. Many, no doubt, were as unthankful as the nine lepers; yet did he not withhold his mercy from their bodies. How much more then will he have compassion on those who seek him for their souls! When he beholds them supplicating for the pardon of their sins, and the renovation of their hearts, will he turn from them, and shut his ear at their cry? no; he will rather fall upon their neck, and kiss them^a; or, as the prophet speaks, "He will save; he will rejoice over them with joy, he will rest in his love, he will joy over them with singing^b." Only let us seek him in truth, and we shall find him rich in mercy unto all that call upon him^c.

Lastly, behold his *power*! However inveterate the diseases of many might be, the whole multitude were healed. And has he less power now that he is in heaven? Has he not "the residue of the Spirit," yea, and "all the fulness of the Godhead dwelling in him?" Why then should any be discouraged? What though our sins be great? can he not forgive them? What though our habits be deeply rooted? can he not overcome them? What though our temptations be manifold? can he not deliver us out of all? Be our "enemies ever so mighty, he that dwelleth on high is mightier." Let us all surround him in expectation of his benefits; and "we shall find him able to save us to the uttermost."]]

TO CONCLUDE—

[Let us now picture to ourselves the state of the multitudes who had touched him: what joys! what raptures! what ecstasies! what congratulations from surrounding friends!

^y John vi. 3, 37.

^z Ps. ciii. 1—3.

^a Luke xv. 20.

^b Zeph. iii. 17.

^c Rom. x. 12.

what universal shouts and acclamations to the honour of the Lord Jesus! none ascribing their recovery to an arm of flesh; but all acknowledging Jesus as the sole author of their happiness! And why should it not be thus with us at this time? Surely, if this whole congregation would but vie with each other in their endeavours to obtain his blessing, they would soon have far more abundant cause for joy, than ever they had, whose bodily health was restored: for their souls should be freed from the deadly malady of sin, yea, “virtue should come forth from him to heal us all.”]

MCCCCXCV.

TRUE HAPPINESS STATED.

Luke vi. 20—26. *And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said, Blessed be ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are ye that hunger now: for ye shall be filled. Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh. Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets. But woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation. Woe unto you that are full! for ye shall hunger. Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep. Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets.*

MEN who dislike the doctrines of the Gospel are no less averse to its precepts. They may both approve and practice heathen morality; but the morality of Jesus will appear to them unamiable and precise. The words before us will fully establish this assertion^a: they lead us to consider,

I. The false notions which the world entertains of happiness—

Many have been the speculations of philosophers on this subject; but there are general views in which the world at large are agreed—

^a It should be observed that this passage has no direct reference to the deeper mysteries of our religion: it is altogether of a practical nature: and the terms are so full, that they scarcely need any elucidation, while they are at the same time so plain as to be almost incapable of perversion.

[They think that wealth must of necessity conduce much to our happiness: they think that a freedom from care and trouble will greatly augment it: they think that an easy access to pleasurable amusements and carnal enjoyments will abundantly promote it; and, above all, that universal respect and honour will complete it.]

These views, however, are very erroneous—

[We deny not but that these sources of enjoyment afford a present gratification: nor do we say that wealth, or ease, or pleasure, or reputation, may not be very innocently enjoyed: but it is a great mistake to think that happiness consists in these things; or that, if possessed in ever so great abundance, they would compensate for the want of spiritual blessings. There are riches of far greater value than the wealth of this world; nor can any one possess *those*, who is very solicitous about *this*^b. None can know his need of divine grace, and not pant after it^c: in such indigent creatures, a Laodicean state is abominable^d. Moreover, God calls men to mourn and weep for their sins^e: is it desirable then to possess a light and vacant mind? Such too is the enmity of the world against God, that it is not possible to retain the friendship of both at the same time^f. Should we then consider human estimation as of transcendent value? Surely these things may shew us how erroneous the world's judgment is.]

Nor is there any delusion more fatal—

[Our Lord could not be mistaken in his judgment; yet he denounces the heaviest woes against the rich, the full, the gay, and the respected, and distinctly assigns his reason for each denunciation. They who are occupied with carnal gratifications, make no provision for their eternal welfare. Hence, when bereft of the things of this life, they will be for ever destitute. Having had their portion *now* with the men of this world, they will participate in their lot *hereafter*. We may see these truths realized in the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus^g.]

Having exposed error, we would establish truth, by shewing,

^b Matt. xiii. 44.

^c Ps. xlii. 1.

^d Rev. iii. 16, 17.

^e James iv. 9, 10.

^f James iv. 4.

^g No flagrant evil whatever is imputed to the Rich Man. He was not wholly destitute even of liberality, since Lazarus received his daily subsistence from his table. The reason of his condemnation was, that, while he abounded in wealth, ease, pleasure, and honour, he wept not for his sins, nor hungered after the blessings of grace and glory.

II. The representations of happiness given us in the Scriptures—

Poverty, dissatisfaction, sorrow, and contempt, are, it must be confessed, not pleasing in themselves; nor indeed does any blessing necessarily attach to them; but under certain circumstances they may be a desirable portion—

[Poverty and sorrow often have been, and still are endured for Christ's sake; nor is there any thing more common than for his servants to be reviled and despised for their fidelity to him. It should seem indeed that the world could not hate and execrate those whom God esteems and declares blessed; but the treatment which the prophets, and Christ, and his Apostles, met with, proves the contrary. If we then be treated like them, we have no reason to be dejected; yea rather, we may consider it as an honour conferred on us by God^h.]

In a spiritual sense, poverty, hunger, &c. are great blessings—

[No doubt there is a spiritual meaning also in our Lord's wordsⁱ. And what so desirable as to feel our need of Christ? And what so desirable as to be hungering after his righteousness? And what so desirable as to be mourning for our corruptions? And what so desirable as to endure shame for his sake^k? They who experience most of this state, find most delight in it; they are most fortified against the incursions of worldly sorrow, and most abound in spiritual consolations.]

And all who now submit to the pressure of spiritual afflictions, shall be abundantly recompensed in the eternal world—

[In heaven there is enough to repay all our labours. The riches of glory will compensate for all present losses; the fulness of joy in those blest abodes will satiate the hungry soul; the inconceivable delights will far outweigh our transient sorrows^l; and the honour which God will put upon us in the society of saints and angels, will make us forget our short-lived disgrace. Christ, the true and faithful witness, has repeatedly affirmed this: and he who declares such persons blessed, himself will make them so.]

ADDRESS—

1. The mistaken votaries of this world—

[All profess to seek after happiness; but how many mistake the shadow for the substance. We may even appeal to you

^h Phil. i. 29.

ⁱ Compare Matt. v. 3, 4.

^k Acts v. 41.

^l 2 Cor. iv. 17.

to declare who are truly blessed^m. O that we would take eternity into our estimate of present things! O that we would cease from circulating our fatal errors, and acquiesce in the unerring declarations of God! We can easily see, that a man who should drink a palatable but poisonous draught, would be no object of envy. Let us be persuaded then that momentary delights can never constitute us blessed. He alone is happy, who is happy for eternity.

2. The humble followers of Jesus—

[Let not your hearts envy the prosperity of sinnersⁿ. Remember that you are the only blessed people upon earth. Your very griefs and sorrows are grounds of self-congratulation. The time is shortly coming, when men's apparent states will be reversed. Then will be fulfilled that glorious prophecy of Isaiah^o— Be content then to “fill up the measure of Christ's sufferings,” and take for your comfort that delightful promise^p—]

^m Comment on the text according to the world's views; “Woe to you poor, &c.: but no woes to you that are rich, &c.; ye are blessed:” Who would endure such a comment?

ⁿ Ps. xxxvii. 1, 2. ^o Isai. lxx. 13, 14. ^p Ps. cxxvi. 5, 6.

MCCCCXCVI.

THE BLIND LEADING THE BLIND.

Luke vi. 39. *And he spake a parable unto them; Can the blind lead the blind? shall they not both fall into the ditch?*

IGNORANCE is, in itself, more excusable than vice; but in some cases its effects are equally pernicious^a. This is manifestly true in the concerns of the soul: a person, ignorant of the way of salvation, must fall short of heaven; and if he undertake to direct others, will ruin all who follow him. To impress this truth on our minds, our Lord repeatedly uttered this parable^b—

I. The scope of the parable—

The Pharisees, through their professed sanctity, gained extensive influence, and were implicitly

^a A person may ruin himself no less by imprudence than by debauchery; and a General may bring as great calamities on his army through unskilfulness, as if he had betrayed them into the hands of their enemies.

^b Matt. xv. 14.

followed by the deluded populace. The consequences were extremely fatal to them both.

In this parable our Lord intended to reprove,

1. The presumption of such guides—

[No man should undertake an office for which he is not qualified, much less so important an office as that of guiding men to heaven. Yet many assume it for filthy lucre's sake, without any other qualification than that of a little human learning. But what would be thought of a man, who, because he was conversant with the learned languages, and philosophy, should engage to navigate a ship? Yet he would only subject a few hundreds of persons to temporal death; whereas a minister that misleads his people, involves thousands in everlasting destruction. How horrible is such presumption! and how surely must it bring down upon the offenders the signal vengeance of heaven^c! Let all who would not perish under such an accumulated load of guilt, examine well their motives for undertaking, their qualifications for discharging, and their manner of executing, this high office^d.]

2. The folly of such followers—

[The generality never once consider whether their guide be competent to direct them, nor inquire into the truth of the directions given them. They commit their souls to his care, as though there were no possibility of erring, or no danger in error. They even prefer such teachers as “prophesy unto them smooth things^e.” But would any man act thus in matters of less importance? Would any person who had a disorder to be healed, or a cause to be tried, employ a physician or a lawyer that was ignorant of his profession, if he could have access to one of approved ability? Would any blind person commit himself to the guidance of one who also was destitute of sight? Can any one doubt what would be the consequence of such folly? What madness then is it for men to rest satisfied with the instructions of those, whose whole

^c 2 Chron. xxvi. 16—21.

^d It should be remembered, that it is not human learning which can qualify a man for the ministerial office, but rather an experience of true religion in his own soul. The Pharisees were acquainted with *the letter* of the Scriptures, but they understood not *the spirit* of them: they saw not the spirituality of the moral law, nor the typical import of the ceremonial law. Thus being ignorant of their fallen state, and of the means appointed for their recovery, they were only blind guides. *A man must be converted himself, before he undertakes to convert others*: he must be able to adopt the language of the Apostle.—See 1 John i. 1, 3.

^e Isai. xxx. 9—11. Jer. v. 30, 31.

dispositions and conduct manifest, that they are ignorant of the way to heaven! That their guides will be partakers of their doom, will afford but little consolation to them, when they themselves are suffering the bitter consequences of their folly^f.]

The truth asserted in the parable is too obvious to need either proof or illustration; we shall therefore proceed to consider,

II. The lessons we should LEARN from it—

Though the familiarity of our Lord's expressions appears at first sight calculated to produce a smile, they afford just occasion for the most solemn admonitions.

1. Guard against error in the concerns of your souls—

[Many suppose that ignorance is an excuse for error: but God has sufficiently warned us against this mistake^g. It is certain, that there is a great diversity of doctrines among those who undertake to teach — — — and, that error is more prevalent than truth — — — But the multitudes who throng the broad road, cannot procure safety for those who walk in it. We must dare to leave the beaten track of self-righteousness and formality, for the less frequented path of faith and holiness; nor must we hope to reach the fold of God, unless we follow the footsteps of his flock^h.]

2. Try what you hear by the touchstone of God's word—

[The Scriptures are the only proper rule of our faith and practice: to them we must refer every thing as to an unerring standardⁱ, nor must any human authority supersede the exercise of our own judgment^k. If an angel from heaven were to preach, we ought to try his word by this test. This was approved in the Bereans of old^l; and it is expressly enjoined on us^m.]

3. Seek the instruction and guidance of the Holy Spirit—

[However plainly man may preach, God alone can enable you to profitⁿ. Of yourselves you will be far more ready to

^f The whole of this subject requires to be treated with peculiar tenderness, lest we appear to be bringing only a railing accusation against our brethren, when we should be seeking rather the edification of our flock. We must not indeed shrink from expounding any portion of God's word; but we must always be careful to "speak the truth *in love*."

^g Hos. iv. 6. Isai. xxvii. 11. Eph. v. 6.

^h Cant. i. 8. Matt. vii. 13, 14.

^k Matt. xxiii. 8—10.

^l Acts xvii. 11.

ⁱ Isai. viii. 20.

^m 1 Thess. v. 21.

ⁿ Isai. xlviii. 17.

embrace the self-exalting tenets of deceivers, than the humiliating doctrines of the Gospel. But the Holy Ghost shall be given to those who seek his influence^o, and shall guide into all truth those who submit to his teaching^p. Let all then, whatever be their capacity or attainments, implore his help: then, though babes in human science, they shall be taught the things that are hid from the wise and prudent^q.]

^o Luke xi. 13.

^p John xvi. 13. 1 John ii. 20.

^q Matt. xi. 25, 26.

MCCCCXCVII.

THE TREE KNOWN BY ITS FRUITS.

Luke vi. 43—45. *A good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit; neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. For every tree is known by his own fruit. For of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble-bush gather they grapes. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart, bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart, bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh.*

IT is of infinite importance to every man to attain a knowledge of his state and character before God. For, as such a knowledge would be the best preservative against a self-exalting and censorious spirit, so would it keep us from deluding ourselves with a merely nominal and formal religion^a. In order to attain it we must examine our words and actions, and trace them to their proper source. Thus, by discovering what is in the heart, we shall be enabled to form a just estimate of our own character, and be guarded against a fatal presumption on the one hand, and a needless disquietude on the other. This mode of inquiry is suggested in the parable before us; which indeed deserves the more attention, because it was delivered by our Lord on several different occasions. There are two truths which it offers to our consideration:

I. It is the heart that regulates the life—

^a See the context.

The heart is, as it were, a fountain, from whence all our actions proceed—

In it there is a treasure either of good or evil—

[While we are unregenerate, we are full of erroneous principles, and sinful affections. We “think that God is even such an one as ourselves;” that he will neither “do good” to them that serve him, “nor evil” to those who rebel against him^b. We judge sin to be light and venial, and a worldly carnal life to be consistent with a hope of immortality and glory. While such are our principles, what can be expected, but that “our affections should be set on things below, and not on things above?” Our hopes and fears, our joys and sorrows, are excited only by the things of time and sense: and those invisible realities, which alone deserve our esteem, are disregarded and despised. What a “treasure of evil” is thus formed within us^c! who can number our rebellious thoughts, our unhallowed desires, our vicious indulgences? How has this treasure been accumulating from our earliest infancy to this present moment! and we, alas! are as averse to part with it as if it rendered us really happy, or would “profit us in the day of wrath.” The regenerate person, on the contrary, has within him a “treasure of good.” His principles and affections are the very reverse of what they once were. His views of God, of sin, and the world, are regulated by the Holy Scriptures; and his desires and pursuits are conformable to the dictates of religion. Thanks be to God, this treasure also is daily accumulating; and he esteems himself rich only in proportion as the love and fear of God increase in his heart.]

According as this treasure is, such will be the life—

[The “waters flowing from a fountain” must of necessity be “bitter or sweet” according as the fountain itself is good or bad. So where a treasure of evil is in the heart, the words and actions must be evil also. “Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth will speak;” and by that great moving spring will all the members be actuated. Doubtless there may be a freedom from gross immorality, and a conduct in many respects amiable and praiseworthy, while yet the heart is unrenewed: but fruit that is really good can no more proceed from an unregenerate soul, than “figs and grapes from a thorn or bramble-bush.” On the other hand, where the treasure of the heart is good, the life will certainly be good also. A holy practice must of necessity flow from holy principles and heavenly affections. We say not indeed but that there may be found some faults even in the holiest of men, even as blighted or unsound fruit may be found upon the choicest tree. But the good can

^b Ps. l. 21. Zeph. i. 12.

^c Mark vii. 21—23.

no more practise iniquity, so as to continue in it, than the bad can bring forth habitually the fruits of righteousness. St. John assigns the same reason as is suggested in the text, "He cannot sin, because the seed of God remaineth in him^d," and, as an operative principle, regulates his life.]

This truth being established, the other follows as a necessary consequence, viz.

II. It is by the life that we must judge of the heart—

Though we are not to scrutinize too nicely the motives by which others are actuated, so as to form an *uncharitable* judgment respecting them, yet we may, and *must* in some cases, judge of men by their actions. Our Lord uttered the very parable before us on one occasion, expressly with a view to guard us against the influence of false teachers and false brethren^e. But it is of our own hearts that we are principally called to judge; and assuredly,

The man whose life is good may know his heart also to be good—

[If "every tree is known by its own fruit," (and no man hesitates to call a vine, or a bramble, by its proper name when he sees the fruit) we need be in no fear of concluding that our hearts are good, when our dispositions and actions accord with the word of God. No man indeed is *perfectly* good, because we still carry about with us "a body of sin and death:" but he, who discovers the renovation of his heart by the holiness of his life, is certainly possessed of a "good treasure," and may justly be called "a good man."]

The man also whose life is evil may conclude with equal certainty that his heart is evil—

[Many, when they cannot deny the sinfulness of their conduct, will yet affirm that their hearts are good. But what is this but to affirm, in spite of the most indubitable evidence to the contrary, that a bramble is a vine or fig-tree? Let any man put the question to his own conscience, Can a man, who lives in a neglect of God and his own soul, have a *good* heart? Can the proud, the passionate, the revengeful, the lewd, the intemperate, the covetous, have *good* hearts? Then may a bramble be a fig-tree, notwithstanding it never bears any thing but thorns and briars.]

ADDRESS—

^d 1 John iii. 9.

^e Matt. vii. 15, 16.

1. Those whose fruits are evil—

[It is not the openly profane, or the grossly sensual alone, but all, who are not really bringing forth the fruits of righteousness and true holiness, that we now address. And what must we say? Shall we flatter you? We dare not: the Scripture speaks plainly; and it would be at the peril of our souls to conceal the truth: St. John expressly calls you children of the devil^f: and our Lord declares that everlasting fire must be your portion^g. Shall it seem unreasonable that such should be the doom of the ungodly, while the righteous are admitted into heaven? Are you at a loss to assign a reason why so great a difference should be put between persons, who, to outward appearance, do not differ very widely from each other? Know that, if you trace the stream to its source, and examine their hearts, there will be found as great a difference between them, as between the portions that they shall hereafter receive. The one has nothing but a treasure of evil principles and evil affections within him; the other is a “partaker of the Divine nature,” and is “transformed into the very image of his God.” Seek then to have “a new heart and a right spirit renewed within you.” “YE MUST BE BORN AGAIN;” and that too for this plain reason, because what you have by nature is altogether carnal; and you must receive a spiritual nature to qualify you for the enjoyment of a spiritual kingdom^h. Ye must become “new creatures:” “instead of the thorn must come up the fir-tree, and instead of the brier must come up the myrtle-tree,” if ever you would be monuments of God’s saving mercyⁱ.]

2. Those whose fruits are good—

[Doubtless you wish to have your evidences of conversion more and more clear. With this view it will be well to mark all your words and actions, and to trace them to their motives and principles. But do not forget that though your own works are the *evidences of your conversion*, they are not the *grounds of your acceptance with God*. It is Christ’s obedience unto death that must be the one foundation of your hope. However holy your life be, your eyes must never be turned from Christ. HE is your only, and your all-sufficient Saviour. In him you are to hope, as well when your evidences are obscured, as when they are bright. Nevertheless you should endeavour to abound more and more in all the fruits of righteousness, that you may have the comfort of an assured hope, and God may be glorified in your deportment.]

^f 1 John iii. 8, 10.^g Matt. vii. 19. and xii. 35—37.^h John iii. 6.ⁱ Isai. lv. 13.

MCCCCXCVIII.

THE FOLLY OF A FRUITLESS PROFESSION.

Luke vi. 46. *Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and donot the things which I say?*

THE honour of Christ and the salvation of our souls depend on our having right views of the Gospel: we cannot therefore too earnestly insist on the doctrine of justification by faith in Christ. Nevertheless we should constantly urge the practice of good works as the fruits and evidences of our faith. The folly of expecting salvation while we neglect them is strongly represented by our Lord in the text.

I. Shew who they are that deserve the censure in the text—

The heathens have less to aggravate their sins than Christians. The greater part of those who live in countries that are evangelized are obnoxious to this censure—

1. Mere nominal Christians deserve it—

[Many are Christ's, as having been devoted to him in baptism. By the appellation of Christians they profess themselves his followers; but they are in no respect subject to his will and word. Christ commands them to "seek first the kingdom of God," &c. and they seek it last.]

2. Formal, self-righteous persons deserve it—

[Many will go far in the outward duties of religion: they will profess too a veneration for the name of Christ: but he calls them to regeneration^a, and they deny their need of it. He bids them live by faith on him, and it proves a hard saying^b: they are satisfied with the form of godliness, without the power.]

3. False professors deserve it—

[None are so worthy of reproof as they: they will talk much of their dependence on Christ: they will profess perhaps to have experienced much of his power and grace: they may even glory in the recollection of his truth and faithfulness; but in the midst of all, they can be proud, covetous, passionate, censorious, unforgiving, deceitful, and dishonest. To such the text may be applied with peculiar energy.]

^a John iii. 3.

^b John vi. 53, 60.

Such persons ought to be addressed with all plainness of speech—

II. Expostulate with them on the folly of their conduct—

The service of God is justly called a “reasonable service;” but a fruitless profession is most unreasonable. No reason can be assigned “why” persons should rest in such a state—

1. Is not a conformity to Christ’s precepts practicable?

[Many allege, that such strictness as he requires is unattainable. We allow that absolute perfection is not to be expected in this world; but an unreserved devotedness of ourselves to God is attainable. Thousands of the saints of old have walked thus with God: there is a cloud of living witnesses who exemplify this conduct. God has promised grace to all who seek it diligently.]

2. Is not obedience to him necessary?

[We may be good citizens if we possess only the virtues of heathens; but an unfeigned regard to Christ is necessary to constitute us Christians. St. Paul has fully declared the inefficacy of outward religion^c. Judas and the foolish virgins awfully exemplified it^d. Our Lord has warned us all respecting it^e.]

3. Will not a feigned allegiance be discovered by him?

[We may easily deceive our fellow-creatures; but every motion of our hearts is visible to Christ^f: nor can the most specious appearances deceive him^g. In his final judgment he will shew that he was privy to our most secret thoughts and desires^h.]

4. Shall we not wish at last that we had been sincere and upright?

[The reproach which attends the exercise of real religion, may make us satisfied with the form of it at present; but in the day of judgment we shall see our follyⁱ. We shall not know what to reply to this question then. The vain excuses we now make we shall not even dare to offer.]

APPLICATION—

[Let all then seek to become Christians indeed. Let us not be afraid to confess our Lord before men; and let us regard

^c Rom. ii. 28, 29.

^d Matt. xxv. 3, 11, 12.

^e Matt. vii. 21—23.

^f Heb. iv. 13.

^g John ii. 24, 25.

^h 1 Cor. iv. 5.

ⁱ Wisd. v. 1—9.

“*what he says,*” not only above all, but in opposition to all, that human counsellors can suggest. Let us take care that our lives be consistent with our professions. Let us *trust* in the Lord as simply, as if obedience were *not* required. Let us *obey* the Lord as zealously, as if obedience *only* were required.]

MCCCCXCIX.

THE CENTURION'S SERVANT HEALED.

Luke vii. 6, 7. *Then Jesus went with them. And when he was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying unto him, Lord, trouble not thyself: for I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof: wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee: but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed.*

NOTHING makes a wider breach among men than a difference in political and religious opinion: but mutual good offices would greatly counteract this evil. Though we can never hope to soften the rancour of all, we may by persevering kindness conciliate the esteem of many. We have before us a remarkable instance of the efficacy of such conduct. The centurion was a heathen, an officer of a hostile nation, stationed in Judæa to keep the Jews in subjection; but instead of oppressing the Jews he had shewed them much favour. He, in his turn, needed their good offices on behalf of his servant; and they gladly became his advocates and intercessors; they even prevailed on Jesus to work a miracle on his behalf.

To elucidate this miracle we shall consider,

I. The centurion's character—

Soldiers, for the most part, are unfavourably circumstanced with respect to religion; but here was one, though a heathen, whose character may well put to shame the greater part of the Christian world. We may observe,

1. His love to his fellow-creatures—

[His servant was grievously afflicted with the palsy nigh unto death^a. In this disorder, persons can do nothing for others,

^a Compare Matt. viii. 6. with Luke vii. 2.

or even for themselves; and in such a state, even dear friends and relatives are ready to think the care of one a heavy burthen; yet this Centurion administered to his servant with the tenderest affection, and interested all he could in the promotion of his welfare^b. What could the servant himself have done more for the kindest master?]

2. His piety towards God—

[He had not embraced either the doctrines or discipline of the Jewish Church; but he had learned to acknowledge the only true God; and he was glad to promote the worship of God, even though he himself did not acquiesce in the peculiar mode in which he was worshipped. He even built a synagogue for the Jews at his own expense^c. What an admirable pattern of liberality and candour! How different from those who will not do any thing without the pale of their own Church! Surely he never afterwards regretted that he had so applied his wealth.]

3. His low thoughts of himself—

[He did not arrogate any thing to himself on account of his rank and authority; nor did he value himself on his benevolence to man and zeal for God. While others judged him worthy that a miracle should be wrought for him, he accounted himself unworthy of the smallest favour. This was the reason of his forbearing to wait on our Lord in person^d. How lovely does such an one appear in the eyes of God and man!]

4. His exalted thoughts of Christ—

[He judged our Lord to be too holy to admit of converse with a heathen. He believed also that Jesus could effect whatsoever he pleased, by a word, and at a distance, without the intervention of any means^e. Nor did he doubt but that universal nature was subject to his will far more than the most obedient soldier could be to the commands of his officer^f. Thus did he ascribe to Jesus a power proper to God alone^g. Well might our Lord's address to the discreet Scribe have been applied to him^h.]

Such a character as this could never meet with a repulse from Jesus.

II. The kindness vouchsafed to him by our Lord—

^b He applied to some of the Jewish elders to use their interest with Jesus on his behalf.

^c ver. 5.

^d On our Lord's near approach to the house, the same humility that had kept the Centurion from going to him, compelled him, as it were, to go, lest he should seem guilty of disrespect. Compare Matt. viii. 13. with the text.

^e ver. 7.

^f ver. 8.

^g Deut. xxxii. 39.

^h Mark xii. 34.

Instantly at the request of the elders Jesus set off to the Centurion's house. He who, though repeatedly importuned, declined to visit a *nobleman's son*ⁱ, went, at the very first summons, to attend upon a *centurion's servant*; and no sooner met the centurion, than he richly recompensed his assiduity—

1. He expressed his admiration of the centurion's faith—

[We never hear of Jesus admiring the things of this world: he rather checked in his Disciples such ill-judged veneration^k; but when he beheld the Centurion's faith, "he marvelled at it." Not that such exercise of grace was *really* unexpected by him. Jesus both knew what was in the Centurion's heart^l, and had planted there the very grace which he exercised^m; but Jesus, as our exemplar, would teach *us* what to admire, and shew us that the smallest portion of true faith cannot be estimated too highlyⁿ. Our Lord declared in his very presence, that this faith had not been equalled by any even of the Israelites themselves^o. Such approbation from *his* mouth could not fail of comforting the afflicted Centurion.]

2. He wrought the desired miracle in confirmation of his faith—

[By a simple act of his will he restored the servant to perfect health, and told the Centurion that it should "be to him according to his faith." Thus he removed the distress of the family in an instant. Thus too he confirmed the faith which had shone forth so nobly, and shewed that we could never expect too much at his hands. What advantage for *eternal* life did the Centurion derive from hence! With what lively hope might he apply to Jesus for the healing of his soul! We can never suppose that such love and piety, such humility and faith, were left to perish. No, verily; that declaration shall be found true to all eternity^p—]

3. He declared that many such persons should be saved, while many, with clearer light and higher privileges, should be cast out—

[They who profess the true religion may be called "the children of the kingdom." But how many of them are destitute of the attainments this heathen had made! How many would have imitated that vile Amalekite rather than him^q—! How many grudge the necessary *contributions* for *keeping up* the

ⁱ John iv. 46—50.

^k Mark xiii. 1, 2.

^l John ii. 25.

^m John i. 16.

ⁿ 2 Pet. i. 1.

^o ver. 9.

^p 1 Sam. ii. 30.

^q 1 Sam. xxx. 13.

houses of God^r! What doubting of Christ's power and grace, yea, what a proud conceit too of their own worthiness, is to be found among professing Christians! Surely what our Lord said respecting the unbelieving Jews shall be realized in Christians of this character^s: and the humbler heathens, who walked agreeably to the light that they enjoyed, shall be preferred before them. Nor can we doubt but that the Centurion, in reference to whom these things were spoken, shall be among that blessed number.]

APPLICATION—

[Let us then learn to plead earnestly for ourselves; nor let a sense of unworthiness keep us from carrying our wants to Jesus — — — Let us also sympathize with, and intercede for, others. Job, like the Centurion, found benefit from his own intercessions^t: nor shall *our* supplications be in vain, either for ourselves or others.]

^r What a contrast to him who, *entirely at his own expense, erected a synagogue for people of another communion!*

^s Matt. viii. 12.

^t Job xlii. 10.

MD.

THE WIDOW'S SON RAISED.

Luke vii. 14—16. *And he came and touched the bier: and they that bare him stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother. And there came a fear on all: and they glorified God, saying, That a great prophet is risen up among us; and, That God hath visited his people.*

THE more faithful any servant of God is, the more he will abound in labours. Of those who were men of like passions with us, none ever equalled St. Paul; but our blessed Lord far exceeded all the children of men. No day elapsed without fresh manifestations of his power and compassion. He had on the preceding day raised the Centurion's servant from a bed of sickness; now we behold him employed in restoring a dead man to life. We shall consider,

I. The miracle—

The Jews used to bury their dead without the precincts of their cities. At the gate of the city of Nain

Jesus met a funeral procession : the principal mourner that followed it engaged his attention—

[She was a mother following *her own son* to the grave. How afflictive is such an event to a tender parent ! This son had *grown up to the estate of manhood*. We may see in David's lamentations for Absalom what an affliction this is ! Her loss was further aggravated in that this was her *only* child. If one out of many had died, she would have been deeply grieved : how much more in losing him, in whom her affections had so long centered ! That which added ten-fold poignancy to her sorrow was, that she was a *widow*. When her husband had died she had been consoled by her surviving child ; but now she had none left to be the support and comfort of declining years. Destroyed both root and branch, she had no prospect but that her name would be extinct in Israel.]

Filled with compassion he wrought a miracle on her behalf—

[Jesus, addressing himself to the mourning widow, bade her not weep. How vain, how impertinent had such advice been, if given by a common man ! But, from him, it came as a rich cordial to her fainting spirit. He then stopped the procession, and said to the dead man, Arise. Nor were the hopes, occasioned by his interference, disappointed. On other occasions he wrought his miracles at the request of others^a. This he performed *spontaneously*, and unsolicited by any. Nothing moved him to it but that very compassion which brought him down from heaven : nor did he exercise this power in the name of another^b. He spake *authoritatively*, as one who could quicken whom he would^c : nor did he merely recall the soul without renovating the body^d ; the restoration to life and vigour was effected *perfectly*, and in an instant^e. To complete the mercy, “he delivered the man to his mother ;” and preferred the comfort of the widow to the honour he himself might have gained in retaining such a follower.]

Such a stupendous miracle could not fail of exciting suitable emotions—

II. The effect it produced—

^a Intercession was made for Jairus's daughter, by her own *father* ; for the Centurion's servant, by his *friends* ; for the paralytic, by his *neighbours* ; but none besought him for this distressed widow.

^b Elijah and Elisha obtained this power by prayer, 1 Kings xvii. 21. 2 Kings iv. 33. ; and Peter wrought his miracles in the name of Jesus, Acts iii. 6. and ix. 34.

^c John v. 21.

^d 2 Kings iv. 34, 35.

^e “He sat up, and began to speak.”

There is little in the Scriptures to gratify our curiosity. Hence we are not told what the man spake, or how the mother was affected at the first interview with her son; but, if *once* she forgot her *pangs*, for joy that he was *born*, how much more her *sorrows now*, that he was *restored to life*? Doubtless the scene must have been inexpressibly interesting—

[We may conceive Jesus, meekly majestic, delivering the man to his mother: but it is not so easy to conceive the first emotions of their minds. *Nature* would stimulate the reunited relatives to expressions of mutual endearment. *Grace*, on the other hand, would rather lead them first to admire and adore their Benefactor. Perhaps, looking alternately on Jesus and on each other, they might stand fixed in silent astonishment. We need not however dwell on that which, at best, is mere conjecture.]

The effect produced on the multitude is recorded for our instruction—

1. They were all filled with fear—

[The people that attended Jesus, and those who followed the funeral, meeting together, the concourse was very great; and one impression pervaded the whole body. The fear which came upon them was a reverential awe: this is natural to man, when he beholds any signal appearance of the Deity. It is equally produced whether God appear in a way of judgment or of mercy^f. Somewhat of this kind is felt by the seraphim before the throne^g: and it would be more experienced by us, if we realized more the Divine presence^h. When it is excited only by some visible display of the Deity, it will generally vanish with the occasion; but when it is caused by faith, it will abide and influence our whole conduct. Happy would it be for us if we were continually thus impressedⁱ.]

2. They glorified God—

[They did not know that Jesus was indeed a divine person; but they manifestly saw that he was “a great prophet,” and that God, after suspending all miraculous interpositions for above three hundred years, had again “visited his people.” In these tokens of God’s favour they could not but rejoice. Doubtless they congratulated each other on this glorious event, and gave vent to their gratitude in devoutest adorations. We have reason indeed to fear that these impressions were soon effaced. Happy had they been if they had retained this

^f Compare Acts v. 11. and Luke i. 65.

^h Jer. x. 6, 7.

^g Isai. vi. 2.

ⁱ Prov. xxviii. 14.

heavenly disposition ; but who has not reason to regret, that mercies produce too transient an effect upon his mind? Let us at least profit by the example they *then* set us, and labour to “glorify God” for the inestimable mercies he has conferred upon us.]

IMPROVEMENT—

1. This history may teach us to sit loose to the things of this life—

[If we possess personal and family mercies, let us be thankful for them. The continuance of them is no less a favour than the restoration of them would be : but let us not inordinately fix our affections upon any created good. We know not how soon our dearest comforts may become the occasion of our deepest sorrows. The case of Job affords a striking admonition to men in all ages^k. Let us then endeavour to practise that advice of the Apostle^l, and place our affections on those things which will never be taken from us^m.]

2. It shews us whither we should flee in a season of deep affliction—

[As no physician could restore the widow’s son, so none could heal her wounded spirit ; but there was one at hand, when she little thought of it, that could do both. That same Almighty Deliverer is very nigh unto us, and calls us to himself when we are bowed down with troubleⁿ. Let us then call upon him under every spiritual or temporal affliction, and, above all, under the guilt and burthen of our sins — — —. And, with a conviction of his all-sufficiency, let us say with Peter^o—]

3. We may take occasion from it to bless God for the preached Gospel—

[The word of Christ is as powerful now in his Gospel as ever it was in the days of his flesh. It quickens many who were dead in trespasses and sins : it rescues them from the *second death*, and awakens them to an *eternal life*. How many have seen the souls, over which they had long mourned, called forth to life by the almighty voice of Jesus ! Let the whole multitude of us then “fear the Lord and his goodness^p.” Let us “glorify him” for sending us such an adorable Saviour : and let us seek, both for ourselves and others, fresh displays of his power and grace.]

^k Job i. 13—19.

^m Col. iii. 2.

^o John vi. 68, 69.

^l 1 Cor. vii. 29—31.

ⁿ Ps. l. 15. Matt. xi. 28.

^p Hos. iii. 5.

MDI.

THE PERVERSE CHILDREN.

Luke vii. 31, 32, 35. *And the Lord said, Whereunto then shall I liken the men of this generation? and to what are they like? They are like unto children sitting in the market-place, and calling one to another, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned to you, and ye have not wept But wisdom is justified of all her children.*

THOUGH man is distinguished from all other animals by the faculty of reason, he is far from submitting readily to its dictates. In things that are agreeable to his mind he is easily persuaded: but where he is at all swayed by prejudice, or passion, or interest, he cannot be prevailed upon, even by the clearest arguments, to embrace truth, or to fulfil his duty. Thus it was with the Pharisees in our Lord's time; on which account he compared them to perverse children, who could not be induced by their companions to participate in their amusements, notwithstanding every endeavour on their parts to accommodate themselves to their wishes^a.

In this parable our Lord intimates,

I. The reception which his Gospel meets with—

God has used a great variety of means in order to recommend his Gospel—

[He published it to the Jews under types and shadows, and gradually unfolded it to them in a long series of prophecies. When the time came for its more general promulgation, he sent the Baptist to prepare their minds, and the Messiah himself to preach it to them, and to confirm his word by miracles without number. He endued also a few poor fishermen with miraculous powers, and sent them to publish the glad tidings, that their divine mission being unquestionable, their testimony might be universally received. Nothing was wanting that could in any wise promote the acceptance of the truth.]

^a It was customary to use pipes both at marriages and at funerals; at the one in cheerful, at the other in plaintive strains. And the children, in their play, are supposed to represent first the festivity of a marriage, and afterwards the lamentations of a funeral: in neither of which could they get their companions to join them.

But in every place the Gospel has been rejected by those to whom it has come—

[The Jews rested in the letter of their law, but hated the spirit of it; they embraced the shadow, but rejected the substance. By whomsoever the Gospel was preached, or under whatsoever form, the great majority of that nation could not be prevailed upon to receive it. Thus at this day, the truth of God is generally disregarded and despised. Men, it is true, profess to be followers of Christ, and to approve of his religion: but they are not suitably affected with it in any respect; they neither rejoice in its promises, nor are humbled by its threatenings; “if we pipe to them, they will not dance; and if we mourn to them, they will not lament.” Notwithstanding there is such a transcendent excellence in the Gospel, and such an exact suitableness to men’s necessities, yet we still have reason to complain, “Lord, who hath believed our report?”]

It is a matter of no small importance to ascertain,
II. The true ground of this reception—

The *ostensible* ground is, that the Gospel is not properly administered—

[The Jews could not confute the arguments of the Baptist or of Christ; but they took occasion from the peculiarities of each to reject their testimony. John, agreeably to the dispensation under which he ministered, was austere in his manners; and Christ, agreeably to the dispensation which he came to introduce, was affable and social: yet, so far were the people from being pleased with either, that of one they said, “He hath a devil;” and of the other, “He is a glutton and a drunkard.”]

Thus it is at this time: men will not say, “I hate the Gospel, and therefore will not attend to it;” but they will find fault with the persons who administer it; and make their peculiarities a plea for despising their message. At one time they represent the ministers of Christ as speaking too much about faith, and thereby depreciating morality: at another time, as insisting so strongly on good works, that they drive men to despair. Sometimes they will object to the truth because it is not read to them from a written discourse: and sometimes because of the earnest and impressive manner in which it is delivered. Even the virtues whereby ministers endeavour to adorn and recommend the Gospel, are often made occasions of offence; and the strictness of their lives, the condescension of their manners, and their assiduity in labours, are stated as grounds of heavy complaint. And as no terms were too opprobrious to be applied to the Baptist and to Christ, so there is no name so ignominious, nor any treatment so harsh,

but it is thought a proper portion for every faithful servant of the Lord.]

The *true* ground, however, must be found in the perverseness of mankind—

[We, at this distance of time, see clearly enough the perverseness of the Jews in their treatment of Christ and his Apostles: but we are not aware of the same principle operating in ourselves. Nevertheless the truth is, that we have imbibed notions, which we do not like to have controverted; and have adopted practices, from which we will not recede. The Gospel proposes humiliating doctrines which we are too proud to receive; and self-denying rules of conduct which we cannot endure to follow. Hence we must either acknowledge that we ourselves are wrong, or find some reason for rejecting the truth. But we cannot altogether profess ourselves infidels and despise the Gospel as a fable; we therefore are constrained to blame the mode in which it is administered, and to condemn the preachers of it in order to justify ourselves. But the real ground of our conduct is, that “we love darkness rather than light;” and, if Jesus Christ himself were again to preach to us, the same conduct which he formerly pursued would give the same offence to his hearers, and be made a pretext for rejecting his testimony.]

But in the close of the parable, our Lord suggests,

III. The encouragement which ministers, notwithstanding this reception, have to preach the Gospel—

The Gospel of Christ, when justly stated, is the truest “wisdom”—

[It is called by St. Paul, “The wisdom of God in a mystery:” and the wisdom of God does indeed beam forth in every part of it, whether we consider the mysteries it reveals, or the mode of its administration. Who can contemplate the method prescribed by God for effecting our reconciliation with him, or for fitting us to enjoy his presence, and not be filled with rapture and amazement? The more we consider the satisfaction of Christ, or the agency of the Spirit, the nature of faith or the beauty of holiness, or, in a word, the union of God’s glory and man’s happiness in the whole scheme of redemption, the more shall we be overwhelmed with wonder at the depths of wisdom contained in it.

The progressive steps also by which it has been dispensed, together with the means by which it has been confirmed and propagated, yea, even the manner in which it has been brought

home with power to our own hearts and consciences, will furnish abundant matter to increase our admiration.

And must not the consideration of this be a rich encouragement to ministers under all the contempt and obloquy with which they and their ministrations are regarded? Yes, they know that what the world account foolishness is indeed the wisdom of God^b; and that “if they be beside themselves, it is to God^c.”]

Moreover, the children of wisdom will assuredly receive their testimony—

[They are “the children of wisdom” who are willing to “sit at wisdom’s gates,” and to obey her dictates; and, such are to be found in every place, notwithstanding the generality prefer the ways of sin and folly. Now “of all these” the Gospel will be approved, embraced, “justified.” They will shew to the world, both by their profession and conduct, that it is indeed “worthy of all acceptance.” While others pour contempt upon it, these will be nourished by it; and while others make it a stumbling-block, over which they fall and perish, these will be rendered by it “wise unto salvation.”

What can a faithful minister wish for more? He knows that his labours shall not be altogether in vain, but that there shall be some who shall be saved by his means, and be “his joy and crown of rejoicing” for evermore: and this far outweighs all the injuries and insults, which in the discharge of his office, he meets with at the hands of a perverse ungrateful world.]

To IMPROVE this subject, observe,

1. What enemies are men to their own happiness!

[What end had the Baptist or Christ in view, when they preached to the people? Was it to raise a party? to get a name? to gratify their own vanity? Was it not rather to instruct and save mankind? Yet, men every where set themselves against them. And of what concern was it to John or Christ that they were called by opprobrious names? But to those who thus despised them it was of infinite moment; because they thereby ensured and aggravated their own eternal condemnation. Thus it is of small concern to us to be loaded with ignominy and reproach: but to those who thus requite our labours, it is an awful matter; for they despise their own mercies, and accomplish their own ruin. Let those who are thus disposed, remember, that they are far greater enemies to themselves than they are to us.]

2. What a blessing is “an honest and good heart!”

^b 1 Cor. i. 23, 24.

^c 1 Cor. iv. 10. and 2 Cor. v. 13.

[They alone who possess this gift can profit from the Gospel. With such a disposition men will overlook the little peculiarities which there may be in those who minister the word, and will endeavour to derive benefit from the word they hear. They will consider that every minister has his proper gift; and that the method which they disapprove, may be well suited to others. They will be thankful that the glad tidings are sent to them; and will receive the word with the affections suited to it^d. They will either “dance or weep” according as the subject calls for humiliation or joy. Thus, instead of rejecting the counsel of God against themselves, they will “justify God^e” by an unfeigned acknowledgment of his truth, and a ready compliance with his will.

Let us then cultivate this disposition; so shall that which is to many “a savour of death unto death, be to us a savour of life unto life^f.”]

^d Acts xvii. 11.

^e ver. 29, 30.

^f 2 Cor. ii. 15, 16.

MDII.

THE INSOLVENT DEBTORS.

Luke vii. 40—42. *And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee, and he saith, Master, say on. There was a certain creditor, which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both.*

PARABLES are well calculated to convey reproof in the most convincing, and at the same time in the least offensive, manner. Nothing could exceed the beauty and efficacy of Nathan’s parable to David: that also in the text was admirably adapted to the occasion^a.

I. The parable itself—

It presents to our view three important truths:

1. We all, though in different degrees, are debtors unto God—

[There is not a man on earth who has not violated the law of God: but, though all are guilty in his sight, some are far more so than others^b. The profane and profligate sinner is doubtless worse than the more decent moralist. We must not,

^a Here the occasion should be briefly stated. ^b See the text.

however, compare ourselves with others^c, but try ourselves by the standard of God's law; and if we bring ourselves to this test, we shall find no cause for boasting, even though we may have been preserved from gross offences.]

2. No man, however little he may owe, can discharge his own debt—

[If we could obey the law perfectly in future, our obedience would no more compensate for our past disobedience, than our ceasing to increase a debt would discharge a debt we had already contracted: but we cannot fulfil all that is required of us, or indeed perform any one action that is absolutely free from all imperfection. How then shall we discharge our debt, when, with all our care, we cannot but daily increase it? Nor will repentance obliterate our offences against God's law, any more than it will those committed against human laws. If therefore neither obedience nor repentance can cancel our debt, we must confess that "we have nothing to pay."]

3. But God is willing freely to forgive us all—

[There is no such difference between one and another as can *entitle* any one to a preference in God's esteem, or procure him a readier acceptance with God. Every one who truly repents and believes in Christ^d, shall surely obtain mercy: no recompence or composition is required to be offered by us^e. On the contrary, an attempt to offer any to God would absolutely preclude us from all hope of his favour^f. None can be accepted who will not come as bankrupts; nor shall any who come in this manner be rejected^g.]

Such being the import of the parable, we proceed to,

II. The IMPROVEMENT that is to be made of it—

Our Lord evidently intended to reprove Simon, while he vindicated both the woman's conduct and his own. Hence it seems proper to improve the parable,

1. For the conviction of self-righteous Pharisees—

[Persons who think their debts small, feel little love to the Saviour themselves, and are ready to censure those who do

^c 2 Cor. x. 12.

^d The parable was not intended to set forth the doctrines of redemption, but merely the effect which a sense of great obligations will produce. And, if we would infer that we have no need of faith in the atonement, because the parable makes no mention of it, we must infer also that we may be forgiven without repentance, since there is no mention made of that.

^e Isai. lv. 1.

^f Gal. v. 4.

^g Isai. i. 18. and lv. 7.

love him. While they approve of zeal in every thing else, they condemn it in religion. But this disposition shews that their seeming piety is mere hypocrisy. If they had any true grace, they would delight to see Christ honoured, and to honour him themselves.]

2. For the vindication of zealous Christians—

[We would not plead for a zeal that is without knowledge : but such a zeal as this grateful penitent discovered must be vindicated, though the whole world should condemn it. Are there any then who weep at the Saviour's feet, and who seek by all means in their power to honour him? Let them go on boldly, yet modestly, fearing neither loss nor shame in so good a cause; and let them know, that HE, for whom they suffer, will soon testify his approbation of them before the assembled universe.]

3. For the encouragement of all penitent sinners—

[Our Lord, both in the parable, and in his address to the woman, shewed that no sinner, however vile, should be spurned from his feet: he even declared to her accusers, and revealed to her own soul, that he had pardoned her sins. Henceforth then let no man despair of obtaining mercy at his hands. Only let us acknowledge to him our inability to pay our own debt, and he will say to us, as to the woman, "Depart in peace, thy sins are forgiven thee."]

MDIII.

THE SINNER'S FAITH.

Luke vii. 50. *And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.*

TO associate with the ungodly world is by no means expedient for those who have been redeemed out of the world. Yet there is a certain degree of intercourse with them which is both proper and desirable. There is a medium between an affecting of their society for our own gratification, and a contemptuous separation from them. Our blessed Lord has exhibited, as in every thing else, so in this also, a perfect pattern. When invited by a Pharisee to dinner, he accepted the invitation with a view to instruct him and do him good: and when a woman who had been a notorious sinner came to him at the

Pharisee's house, he did not refuse her admission to his presence, but received with kindness the expressions of her regard, and, commending *her faith*, imparted to her both the blessings and the comforts of his salvation.

The particular notice which our Lord took of the woman's "*faith*," and the reward he gave her on account of it, leads us naturally to consider,

I. The marks and evidences of her faith—

The first thing that calls for our attention is,

1. Her zeal—

[She had doubtless seen many of our Lord's miracles, and heard many of his discourses; and though she was not yet one of his avowed followers, yet, having received good to her soul, she was desirous of honouring him to the utmost of her power. For this purpose she sought him out in the Pharisee's house, and went to him with a full determination to shew him some signal mark of her regard.

Now this argued no little zeal. As being of the weaker sex, she was the more liable to be condemned as officious, impertinent, and obtrusive. And being of a notoriously vile character, she was particularly obnoxious to insult and contempt. But unmindful of these things, she went uninvited, to the house of a proud Pharisee (where she was least of all likely to meet with any favour) and (indifferent to the construction that might be put upon her conduct by any censorious spectators, or even to the treatment she might receive from any of them) in the presence of the whole company expressed to him all that was in her heart.

And what was it that enabled her thus to "despise all shame," and to triumph over the fear of man? Doubtless it was her faith: for the Apostle says, "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."]

2. Her humility—

[Though she was bent on executing her pious purpose, she was solicitous to do it in as private and modest a manner as she could. She therefore went behind him as he lay upon the couch^a, and, having easy access to his feet, placed herself there, without attracting the notice of the company, or interfering with the conversation that might be passing at table.

This also was a strong mark and evidence of her faith. She knew his august character, and felt herself unworthy to enter into his presence; yea, she accounted it the very summit of her ambition to be permitted to kiss his feet. It was in this

^a They did not sit at table as we do, but lay on couches.

way that the faith of the centurion and others shewed itself^b; and though, through the remaining pride and ignorance of their hearts, young converts often, like Jehu, seek the notice and applause of men, humility will always be found to exist in the soul in exact proportion to our faith.]

3. Her contrition—

[No sooner had she placed herself near the Saviour, than all her sins presented themselves to her mind, and filled her with deep compunction. Instantly she burst into a flood of tears, with which she bathed, as it were, the feet of her Lord, while she embraced them, in hopes of finding mercy from the friend of sinners.

Now it is the property of faith to “look on him whom we have pierced, and mourn^c.” Yea, the more lively faith any have possessed, the more abundant has been their self-loathing and self-abhorrence^d. We cannot doubt therefore but that faith was the principle from whence her humiliation flowed.]

4. Her love—

[While she wept over the Saviour's feet, she wiped them with the hairs of her head, and kissed them, and anointed them with odoriferous ointment. It was not possible for her to manifest stronger tokens of her affection.

And was not this also an evidence of her faith? Had she been an unbeliever, she would have seen “no beauty or comeliness in Jesus” that deserved her admiration^e: but believing in him, she accounted him “fairer than ten thousand, and altogether lovely^f,” according to that declaration of the Apostle, To them that believe, he is precious^g.]

5. Her confidence—

[She would not have ventured to approach the Pharisee in this manner, because she knew that he would despise her in his heart, and dismiss her with scorn. But she felt no apprehension of such treatment from the Saviour. She well knew his condescension and compassion; and therefore without reserve, and without fear, she cast herself upon his mercy.

In this too she shewed the strength of her faith. Unbelief would have suggested many doubts; Will he receive me? Will he deign to look upon such an abandoned wretch? But faith enabled her to approach him under a full persuasion, that “whosoever came to him should in no wise be cast out.”]

It was not in vain that she thus approached the Saviour; as we shall see, while we consider,

^b Luke vii. 6, 7. Mark v. 25—28.

^c Zech. xii. 10.

^d Job xlii. 6. Isai. vi. 5. 1 Tim. i. 15.

^e Isai. liii. 2.

^f Cant. v. 10, 16.

^g 1 Pet. ii. 7.

II. The fruits and consequences of her faith—

Though despised and condemned by the Pharisee, she was well rewarded by her Lord. She obtained from him,

1. The pardon of her sins—

[Numerous as her iniquities had been, they were all in one moment blotted out from the book of God's remembrance. Jesus, who "had all power on earth to forgive sins," pardoned all her offences, and "cast them, as it were, behind him into the very depths of the sea." What a blessed fruit and consequence of her faith was this! Had she been subjected to all the evil treatment that could have been shewn her, she would have had no reason to regret that conduct by which she had obtained so inestimable a blessing.

And was this peculiar to her? Shall not we also have our iniquities forgiven, if we apply to him in humility and faith? Shall the greatness of our sins be any bar to our acceptance with him, if we repent and believe? Let the word of God be deemed worthy of any credit, and all such apprehensions will vanish in an instant^h — — —]

2. An assurance of her acceptance—

[Twice did our Lord repeat to her the joyful tidings, that her sins were pardoned, and that her soul was saved; and to confirm it, he bade her depart in peace. What a cordial must this have been to her drooping spirit! How transported must she have been with the joyful sound! And what comfort must she enjoy through life in a sense of the Divine favour!

But neither was this peculiar to her. It is true, that many real Christians never attain to this high privilege: but it is owing to the weakness of their faith: if their faith operated as her's did, if it shewed itself in such humility, such contrition, such love, such confidence, such zeal, they also should hear him say to them, "Be of good cheer; thy sins are forgiven thee." What though he should not utter it by an audible voice from heaven, can he not reveal it to the soul by his Spirit, and enable us to say, "My beloved is mine, and I am hisⁱ?" Yes: let us only glorify him to the utmost of our power, and he will give us a peace that passeth all understanding^k, and a full assurance of hope unto the end^l.]

3. Everlasting happiness and glory—

[In the declaration of Jesus she received both a pledge and an earnest of her eternal inheritance. Nor can we doubt

^h Acts xiii. 39. Isai. i. 18.

ⁱ Cant. ii. 16.

^k Phil. iv. 7.

^l Heb. vi. 11. See also 2 Tim. i. 12. and iv. 8.

but that, after waiting her "appointed time upon earth," she was admitted to the enjoyment of her Lord in heaven, not any longer to weep at his feet, but to sit with him on his throne, and to participate his glory.

Thus also shall it be with all who truly believe: "they shall never perish, but shall have eternal life^m" — — —]

From this history we may LEARN,

1. The nature of faith—

[We cannot too carefully inquire into the nature of faith; for there is nothing respecting which so many, and such fatal, mistakes are made. Faith is not a mere assent to any doctrines whatsoever; but it is a living principle in the soul, which evidences itself by precisely such a regard to Christ as this woman manifested on this occasion. Would we then ascertain whether our faith be genuine and saving? let us inquire whether it lead us to Christ, in spite of all obstacles from without or from within, with humility and contrition, with love and confidence? For in proportion as we abound in these graces, or are destitute of them, we either possess, or are destitute of, a living faith.]

2. The excellence of faith—

[Admirable were the graces which this woman exercised; yet not one of them was noticed by our Lord: he overlooked them all; and noticed that only *which was least apparent, and which every one else would have overlooked*, namely, her faith. He knew that this was the root or principle from whence all her other graces sprang. It was this that led her so to honour him; and therefore he determined to honour it. And must not that be excellent which he so highly regarded, so studiously searched out, and so eminently distinguished?

But what is it that he here assigns to her faith? it is nothing less than the saving of her soul: he passes by all her other graces as having no weight or influence whatever in her justification before God, and specifies her "*faith*" as that which "saved" her. Is it possible to bestow a higher commendation on it than this?

If it be asked, why faith is thus distinguished above all other graces? we answer, it is because faith unites us unto the Saviour, and interests us thereby in all that he has done and suffered for us: but this cannot be said of any other grace whatever; and therefore, though every other grace *adorns* the soul, no grace but faith will *save* it.

Let us all seek to attain right sentiments on this most important point, and pray with the Apostles, "Lord, increase our faith."]

^m John iii. 16.

3. The condescension of Christ to believing penitents—

[If a person of an abandoned character, however changed in his conduct, should come to us when in the midst of company, and that company of a higher order and Pharisaic cast, and should express such affection for us, our pride would be apt to rise; and, while we blushed for the degradation we seemed to suffer, we should be ready to condemn him for his unseasonable intrusion, or perhaps to suspect that he was deranged in his mind. But Jesus accounted himself honoured by the testimonies of the woman's regard: and, though he could not but know what reflections would be cast upon his character on account of his kindness to her, he vindicated her conduct, and richly recompensed her kind attentions.

Thus will he do to every believing penitent. He will compensate the scoffs of an unbelieving world by manifest tokens of his approbation. He will not regard the quantity or quality of a man's past offences; but will speak peace to his soul, and in due time "wipe away all tears from his eyes" for ever. O that we might all consider this, and experience it to our eternal joy!]

MDIV.

THE LIGHTED CANDLE.

Luke viii. 16—18. *No man, when he hath lighted a candle, covereth it with a vessel, or putteth it under a bed; but setteth it on a candlestick, that they which enter in may see the light. For nothing is secret, that shall not be made manifest; neither any thing hid, that shall not be known and come abroad. Take heed therefore how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have.*

AMONG the ancient philosophers there were some, who instilled into their more immediate followers, principles different from what they avowed to the public at large. But there was no such insincerity in our Divine Teacher. He did indeed instruct his peculiar Disciples more fully than others (for others were not capable of enduring the clear light of his Gospel) but it was his design that, in due season, the whole truth should be made known to the world; and of this his intention he advertised his Disciples, at the

very time that he was explaining to them his public discourses.

In the parable before us he suggests the duty,

I. Of those who preach the Gospel—

The Gospel is a light in the midst of a dark world—

[The world lieth in utter darkness: nor has it any means of discovering the way of acceptance with God, but by the Gospel of Christ. Something of God may be learned from the visible creation: and reason may discover many things that are proper to that relation which we bear to God and to each other: but nothing can be known of Christ, nor can any means of reconciliation with God be devised, by unenlightened reason. It is in the Gospel only that the Saviour is exhibited, and that all the things belonging to our peace are fully revealed. Hence the word of the Gospel is represented as a light shining in a dark place^a, and as that light to which the whole world must be indebted for life and salvation^b.]

It is the duty of ministers to preach this Gospel,

1. With fidelity—

[It is not sufficient to amuse the people with moral essays, or with dissertations that shall display our own learning. We must preach Christ crucified. We must “determine to know nothing else among our people^c.” We must never omit any opportunity of setting before men that “light which God has sent into the world.” We may indeed, yea we must, use discretion in our method of dispensing the Gospel, lest by an injudicious declaration of the truth we injure those whom it is our desire to benefit^d: but, in this, we must be actuated, not by worldly policy or the fear of man, but solely by a love to the souls of our fellow-creatures. When no *such* necessity imposes a restraint, we must declare the whole counsel of God^e.]

2. With perseverance—

[As a man should not substitute any thing else in the place of the Gospel, so neither should he withdraw from the engagements he has solemnly entered into to preach the Gospel^f. Neither political ambition, nor worldly care, can ever justify a man in intermitting, much less in vacating, the paramount duties of the ministry^g: not even sickness itself is any excuse for neglecting to employ the strength we have in the

^a 2 Pet. i. 19.

^b Isai. lx. 1—3.

^c 1 Cor. ii. 2.

^d John xvi. 12. 1 Cor. iii. 1, 2. Heb. v. 11, 14.

^e Acts xx. 20, 27.

^f Lev. xxvii. 28. with Luke ix. 62. 1 Cor. ix. 16, 17.

^g 2 Tim. ii. 3, 4.

service of our God^h. We do not say, that the education of youth is incompatible with the ministry : but it should never be suffered to make void the superior obligations which we owe to God, and to the souls of men. It may be made subservient to the ministry ; but must never supersede it.]

From the duty of those who preach the Gospel, we pass on to consider that,

II. Of those who hear it—

We should “ take heed how we hear it”—

[We should be extremely careful *what* we hearⁱ; lest we be led astray by those who profess to guide us into the way of peace^k. We must also be duly attentive to *the manner* in which we hear. We must not be indulging a vain curiosity, or a disposition to cavil; but must receive the word *humbly*, as the word of God himself^l; *attentively*, in order to retain it^m; and *obediently*, with a view to practise all that it enjoinsⁿ. If, like those to whom this injunction was given, we be already in the ministry, or are preparing for it, our obligations to profit by the word, whether in the Church or in the closet, are greatly increased.]

An attention to this duty is of infinite importance—

1. We shall invariably receive benefit in proportion as we do attend to it—

[Who that has ever searched the Holy Scriptures in private, and waited diligently on the public ministration of the Gospel, has not found that, together with increasing views of the truth, his faith, his hope, and all his graces, have been strengthened and confirmed^o? — — —]

2. We shall assuredly suffer loss in proportion as we neglect it—

[From whatever cause we are led to slight the ordinances of religion, or to decline from the study of the sacred oracles, we shall soon find occasion for regret and sorrow. We may ask of all who have experienced such declension, Have you not lost much of the light and liberty which you once enjoyed in your souls? have not your graces languished; your corruptions gathered strength; your difficulties increased; your comforts vanished? — — —]

God has inseparably connected prosperity with diligence, and with remissness want^p.]

^h 1 Tim. v. 23. Paul does not say, *Leave off preaching*; but, *Take care of your health*.

ⁱ Mark iv. 24.

^k Prov. xix. 27.

^l 1 Thess. ii. 13.

^m Heb. ii. 1.

ⁿ Jam. i. 21, 22.

^o Acts xvii. 11, 12.

^p Prov. x. 4. Matt. xxv. 28, 29.

APPLICATION—

[If the true light now shine around you, be thankful for it, and walk in the light, lest the candlestick be removed^q, and ye be left in utter darkness^r: and “let all make their light to shine before men;” that, being “as lights in the world,” they may “win by their holy conversation” those who have resisted the light of the written word, and shut their ears against the preached Gospel^s.]

^q Rev. ii. 5.^r John xii. 35.^s 1 Pet. iii. 1, 2. Phil. ii. 15, 16.

MDV.

DIRECTIONS HOW TO HEAR SERMONS.

Luke viii. 18. *Take heed therefore how ye hear.*

THE office of a Christian minister is arduous. He is to explain and enforce every part of man's duty: he is to search out and censure every sin. After all his labours, he will see but little fruit. However faithfully he preach, there are but few who will hear aright: this our Lord had just declared in the parable of the sower. He then enforced his declaration with this most important caution. In discoursing upon which, we shall,

I. Assign some reasons for the caution—

Our Lord elsewhere cautions his people to take heed *what* they hear: nor can any thing be more necessary than to be on our guard against error. But the caution *how* we hear was also necessary:

1. Because many hear in an unbecoming manner—

The generality are *careless* hearers—

[They attend God's house merely in conformity with the customs of the country: they suffer their thoughts to rove after earthly and carnal things: they discern very little difference in the doctrines which they hear: they, like Gallio, seem to “care for none of these things.”]

Many are *critical* hearers—

[They can attend to nothing which is not composed with elegance; or they affect only what accords with their own views of religion: they judge of all they hear by a standard of

their own. Hence they form parties, and set up one minister against another^a.]

Many also are *captious* hearers—

[They will not hear any thing which militates against their prejudices: they cannot bear to have their favourite habits condemned^b: they are offended if their bosom lusts be faithfully reprov'd^c: they too much resemble the Scribes and Pharisees of old^d— While there continue such hearers, the caution will be necessary.]

2. Because God himself speaks to us by the preacher—

[Ministers are ambassadors for God, and speak in Christ's stead^e. If they preach what is founded on the Scriptures, their word, *as far as it is agreeable to the mind of God*, is to be considered as God's^f. This is asserted by our Lord and his Apostles^g. We ought therefore to receive the preacher's word as the word of God himself^h. With what humility then ought we to attend to it! What judgments may we not expect, if we slight itⁱ. Surely therefore on this account also we need the caution in the text.]

3. Because every discourse increases either our salvation or condemnation—

[The word delivered is either a savour of life or of death^k. Our Lord himself intimates this reason for the caution^l. Hence our Lord's preaching eventually enhanced the guilt of the Jews^m. The same awful effects will be felt by those who slight his ministersⁿ. What stronger reasons for such a caution can possibly be imagined?]

The necessity of such an admonition being evinced, we,

II. Give some directions for obeying it—

An humble mind will naturally receive instruction in a proper manner—

We should HEAR,

With candour—

[We cannot too carefully divest ourselves of prejudice: we should not "call any man master upon earth." We should rather weigh what we hear, in the balance of the sanctuary^o; but we ought to have our minds open to conviction. We should

^a 1 Cor. iii. 3, 4.

^b Luke xi. 45.

^c Mark vi. 17, 18.

^d Luke xi. 54.

^e 2 Cor. v. 20.

^f Heb. xiii. 7.

^g John xiii. 20. 1 Thess. iv. 8.

^h 1 Thess. ii. 13.

ⁱ Heb. ii. 1—3.

^k 2 Cor. ii. 15, 16.

^l Luke viii. 18.

^m John xv. 22.

ⁿ Heb. vi. 7, 8.

^o 1 Thess. v. 21.

“receive the seed in an *honest* and good heart:” we should “receive with *meekness* the engrafted word:” nor can we hope to profit, if we do not cultivate this disposition.]

With a desire to profit—

[The word of God is profitable for many blessed purposes^p: yet it cannot be serviceable to us, if it be not received in faith^q; but when applied to the soul, its operation is very powerful^r. We should therefore at all times apply it to ourselves: we should go to the ordinances, as the sick to Bethesda's pool. Nor do we ever hear aright, except when we attend in this spirit^s: it is the practical hearer only that derives benefit to his soul^t.]

With an humble dependence on God's Spirit—

[It is God alone who “teacheth us to profit.” Human labours, without his blessing, will be vain^u. It is his work to open the understanding^x, and the heart^y. To him therefore should we look for the teaching of his spirit^z. We should plead the promise which God has given us^a— In this way we shall experience much benefit from the word^b. No obstacles whatever shall be able to withstand its power^c: it shall be a rich source of grace and wisdom to us^d. Let us then offer in sincerity that petition in the Litany^e—]

^p 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17.

^q Heb. iv. 2.

^r Heb. iv. 12.

^s 1 Pet. ii. 2.

^t Jam. i. 22—25.

^u 1 Cor. iii. 7.

^x Luke xxiv. 45.

^y Acts xvi. 14.

^z Eph. i. 17, 18.

^a Isai. lv. 10, 11.

^b Mic. ii. 7.

^c 2 Cor. x. 4.

^d Col. iii. 16.

^e “That it may please thee to give to all thy people increase of grace, to hear meekly thy word, and to receive it with pure affection, and to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit.”

MDVI.

JAIRUS' DAUGHTER HEALED.

Luke viii. 50. *When Jesus heard it, he answered him, saying, Fear not: believe only, and she shall be made whole.*

AFFLICTIONS may well be deprecated by us as painful to flesh and blood; but they are often the means of humbling us before God. Multitudes came as suppliants to our Lord, who would never have regarded him if they had not felt the pressure of disease or trouble. The rich in general were the most backward to acknowledge him; but they found

that in the hour of affliction none other could do them good. Hence occasionally we see the opulent presenting their supplications before him. Nor did he reject the suit of any, whether they were rich or poor. The answer he gave to the ruler of the synagogue is recorded in the text; and it will naturally lead us to notice the ruler's faith:

I. How it was tried—

Jairus (such was his name) had much to try his faith—

[He had an only child (twelve years of age) in dying circumstances. Having heard much of our Lord's miracles, he applied to him on behalf of his daughter, and earnestly requested him to come and restore her to health. But while he was returning with Jesus to his house, his servant brought tidings that the child was dead. This was a dreadful shock to the parent's feelings, and might have utterly destroyed all his hopes.]

Thus it is that the faith of God's people is often tried—

[They are enabled to make application to their God and Saviour. But the storm in the meantime gathers thick around them: their difficulties so increase, that their hopes seem almost blasted. They have cried for pardon, and find only an increasing sense of guilt. They have prayed for deliverance from corruption or temptation, and experienced the assaults of Satan more violent than ever. Thus they are almost ready to think that God has cast out their prayer, and shut up his tender mercies from them. It was in this manner that holy Job was tried. Yea, the experience of most, however diversified, is generally found to agree in this^a.]

But this accumulated trouble was permitted for the further exercise of the ruler's faith.

II. How it operated—

He was enabled humbly and confidently to depend on Jesus—

[It was his faith that first led him to Jesus for help: nor, when his case seemed desperate, did he give up his hope. It is probable that our Lord might perceive some rising apprehensions in his mind; but he sustained him instantly with those encouraging words, "Fear not." Jairus expected now that his

^a Ps. cvii. 5, 6, 12, 13, 18, 19, 26—28.

child should be raised as from a sleep. The idea of sleep, however, only called forth the derision of the mourners. Such was the fruit of their ignorance and unbelief: but the ruler himself resembled the father of the faithful^b.]

It is in this way that true faith will ever shew itself—

[It will surely lead us to Jesus for relief: it will make us humble and importunate in our supplications to him. We shall not presently turn from him because our difficulties increase: we shall rather adopt the expression of holy Job^c—. Unbelief may prompt us to deride what we do not understand; but faith will make us acquiesce in God's declarations, though we cannot fully comprehend them, and expect the accomplishment of his promises, however his providence may appear to contradict them.

Jesus did not fail to respect the faith that honoured him—

III. How it was rewarded—

Jesus answered the ruler to the full extent of all his wishes—

[Our Lord reproved the excessive lamentations of the people, and encouraged them to expect the restoration of the child; but he would not suffer those who had derided him to be spectators of the miracle. He took with him, however, persons sufficient to attest it: he favoured the believing parents with admission to behold it, and restored their daughter, as it had been from sleep, in their very presence. The child arose instantly, and walked as in perfect health. For their further conviction he ordered food to be given to the child. By this also he intimated, that though she was restored by a miracle, she was to be kept alive by natural means. What a rich reward was this to the believing suppliant!]

Nor shall any one who asks in faith, be disappointed—

[Our Lord has commanded us to ask in faith^d; and has assured us that petitions, so offered, shall be answered by him^e. Things the most impossible to man, shall, if they will conduce to our good and to God's honour, be effected by the prayer of faith^f: crimes the most atrocious that ever were committed, shall be pardoned^g: lusts the most inveterate that ever enslaved a soul, shall be subdued^h. The dead in trespasses and sins shall be raised, like Christ himself, to a new and

^b Rom. iv. 18, 20, 21.

^c Job xiii. 15.

^d Mark xi. 24.

^e Matt. xxi. 22.

^f Mark ix. 23.

^g Acts xiii. 39.

^h Isai. lix. 19. 1 Cor. vi. 11.

heavenly lifeⁱ: nor shall they fail of attaining eternal happiness in heaven^k.]

APPLICATION—

[Every man must expect trouble in this vale of tears: the dearest friends must look forward to a day of separation; but let every trouble drive us to the compassionate Jesus, and every want be spread before him in prayer^l. We are not now indeed to expect *miraculous* interpositions; nor ought we to ask for *temporal* blessings in an unqualified manner. We should commit the concerns of this life to his all-wise disposal; but for *spiritual* blessings we cannot be too importunate, nor can our faith in his word be too strong. What he said to Martha he still says to us^m—. The advice of Jehosaphat is the best direction we can followⁿ—. Let us not then limit his tender mercies. If we resemble the Samaritan lord, we shall fare like him^o. Let us not in renewed troubles be like the unbelieving Jews^p; but let us bear in mind that encouraging declaration^q—, and determine henceforth to live like the Apostle^r—.]

ⁱ Eph. i. 19, 20. with ii. 5, 6. ^k John iii. 15. Isai. xlv. 17.

^l Phil. iv. 6.

^m John xi. 40.

ⁿ 2 Chron. xx. 20.

^o 2 Kings vii. 2, 17. ^p Ps. lxxviii. 20. ^q Eph. iii. 20.

^r Gal. ii. 20.

MDVII.

THE FIVE THOUSAND FED.

Luke ix. 12, 13. *And when the day began to wear away, then came the twelve, and said unto him, Send the multitude away, that they may go into the towns and country round about, and lodge, and get victuals: for we are here in a desert place. But he said unto them, Give ye them to eat.*

WITH all our active services for the Lord it is proper to blend devotion and retirement; that so we may not neglect our own vineyard, whilst we are cultivating that of others. But there are calls which may properly supersede for a time our private duties; as God has told us by the prophet, “I will have mercy, and not sacrifice.”

Our blessed Lord, wearied with his continual labours, had retired to a desert place for meditation and prayer. But the people still following him in great numbers, he denied himself those necessary enjoyments, and not only renewed his exertions with

all his wonted earnestness, but supplied by miracle the wants of all who waited on him. This event being replete with instruction, I shall set before you,

I. The Miracle he wrought—

The multitudes who followed him were reduced to the greatest straits—

[The evening was closing in upon them, and they had no provision for the support of their bodies after their great fatigues. What their motives were for such a protracted attendance upon him we do not exactly know. It is possible that some loved to hear his instructions; whilst others sought to obtain either for themselves or their friends a miraculous cure of their disorders: and some possibly were actuated by no better motive than that of gratifying an idle curiosity. But, however this might be, our Lord “had compassion on them,” and determined to avert from them the evils to which their inconsiderate zeal had exposed them. He proposed indeed to Philip, in the first instance, to purchase bread for them. But this proposal was made solely to try the faith of Philip; Philip knew that no funds which they possessed would suffice to feed so many. Two hundred pence, which is about six guineas of our money, would scarcely suffice to give to every one of them a little piece of bread, and much less to satisfy their hunger: and therefore the Apostles proposed that the multitude should be dispersed.]

But our Lord wrought a stupendous miracle for their relief—

[He ordered the multitude to be arranged in rows of fifty in depth and a hundred in breadth: and, that being done, he told his Disciples to dispense to them all the food which they had, consisting of five loaves and two small fishes. This was done: and every Apostle, whilst distributing the food, found the pieces in his hand still undiminished. And, after all were satisfied, he commanded the remnants to be gathered, to no less an amount than twelve baskets full; so ample was the supply, and so indisputable the miracle that had been wrought for them.]

Without dwelling on any of the smaller incidents of the miracle, we may proceed to consider,

II. The instruction to be derived from it—

Truly, it will be found very instructive—

1. In a *moral* view—

[Many valuable lessons does it suggest to us. We may here learn *contentment*: for, when our blessed Lord would feast this whole multitude, he did it not by spreading before them a luxurious entertainment, but by giving them only such provisions as were suited to a laborious fisherman, some barley bread and some cold dried fish. Shall it then be a matter of any concern to us, if we are constrained to subsist on coarser fare, whilst people in higher life are fed with dainties? I am persuaded that this meal was to their taste far sweeter, yes, and in their eyes, more splendid too, than the feast of King Ahasuerus to the heads of his one hundred and twenty-seven provinces. In fact, it is a small matter whether our tables be strewn with delicacies, or we have merely the food that is convenient and necessary for us. "Having food and raiment, though of the coarsest kind, we may well therewith be content;" and may say, as Paul, when his necessities were thus supplied, "I have all, and abound^a."

And surely we may well learn from hence *liberality* also: for when our Lord proposed to his Disciples to give to the distressed multitude all the food which they had, the answer made, was not, 'Lord, what then shall we have left for ourselves?' but simply, 'Lord, for so great a multitude our little store will be of no use whatever:' and when our Lord gave the order to distribute it all, the order was obeyed without the smallest hesitation or delay. This kind of liberality would be but little approved by the Christian world in general. But it is highly approved in the Holy Scriptures; and the poor widow, who gave her whole substance for the use of the temple, was commended for it. In truth, there is no luxury under heaven that can be purchased with money, that is equal to the luxury of doing good. If only we give as *unto the Lord*, we shall never repent of having given too much: for "what we so give to the poor, we lend unto the Lord;" and at no distant period "he will repay us again."

Methinks, too, we may here learn *affiance* also. Our Lord suffered these his followers to come into great straits, and then supplied their wants. And us also he may permit to be encompassed with difficulties for a season: but he will only make them an occasion of manifesting his own watchful care over us, and of magnifying his mercy towards us. True, we are not to expect miracles to be wrought in our behalf: but he has ten thousand ways of providing for his people; and he will do it in the time and manner that he shall see to be best for us: for he has said, "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all needful things shall be added unto you^b." Let him give us ever so much, we are to suffer no

^a Phil. iv. 18.

^b Matt. vi. 33.

waste, but to preserve our very remnants for future use: on the other hand, let our wants be ever so great, we should never doubt but he will supply us in the time of need.]

2. In a *religious* view—

[Who does not see in the conduct of this multitude *how we should seek the Lord*? Did they press upon him thus for the sake of obtaining healing for their bodies, and shall not we for the healing of our souls? Did they forget the very necessities of nature that they might reap the benefit of his instructions, and shall we account any self-denial too great for the obtaining of grace and peace at his hands? I do not indeed think it necessary, or even right, for us to neglect our worldly callings as they did. They could not otherwise have gained access to our blessed Lord, whose august character fully authorized and called for those extraordinary attentions: whereas we have access to him at all times in his ordinances, and may therefore easily make our attendance on him consistent with the discharge of all our relative and social duties. But *in heart* and affection we may well “leave all to follow him:” nor should our own carnal ease or worldly interests ever be suffered to detain us from him, or to interfere with the concerns of our souls.

Here, too, we see *what we may expect at his hands*. See how richly he fed that whole multitude: and will he withhold “the bread of life” from you? Will he not abundantly supply all of you out of his own inexhaustible fulness? Methinks you are here waiting upon him, and seated, as it were, before him to receive at his hands the communications of his grace: and here am I dispensing to you the bread of life according to his command. True, it is but barley bread that you receive: yet shall you find it sufficient for all your necessities, if only you receive it as from Him, and feed upon it as the food of your souls. You are told that, when “Jesus took the loaves and fishes, he looked up to heaven, and blessed them, and then brake and gave them to the disciples, and through the disciples to the multitude. Now, if you will beg of him to bless your provision also that is now dispensed by me, what may you not hope for? Truly your souls shall be fed, yea, and nourished too, unto life eternal. And see that multitude when dismissed to their homes: was there one amongst them that did not adore and magnify their glorious Benefactor? O that it may be so with you at this time! that not one soul may be sent empty away, but every one of you depart refreshed and strengthened for all your future labours! Even so, Amen and Amen.]

MDVIII.

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF CHRIST.

Luke ix. 29—32. *And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistening. And, behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias: who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease, which he should accomplish at Jerusalem. But Peter, and they that were with him, were heavy with sleep: and when they were awake, they saw his glory, and the two men that stood with him.*

THEY, who were the immediate followers of our Lord, beheld him, for the most part, “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;” but, lest they should “be offended in him,” and be tempted to forsake him, he sometimes spake to them of “that glory which he had with the Father before the world was,” and which he should resume as soon as ever the scenes of his present humiliation should be closed. On one occasion he condescended to give to three of them an ocular demonstration of his glory. The particulars are related in the passage before us; in opening which we shall consider,

I. The time and manner of his transfiguration—

Our Lord was at this time engaged in prayer—

[God has on many occasions signally manifested his regard to prayer. It was at the beginning of Daniel's supplications that an angel was sent to reveal to him the period fixed for the Messiah's advent^a. The reason that God assigned for sending Ananias to open the eyes of Saul was, “Behold, he prayeth^b.” Thus Jesus was at this time engaged in prayer. He had retired to a mountain for that very purpose: and this was the season which God chose for distinguishing him in this most signal manner. It is worthy of remark, that every time that God was pleased to bear testimony to his Son by an audible voice from heaven, it was either in, or immediately after prayer^c. And if *we* cultivated more holy intimacy with God, he would more frequently vouchsafe to us also the special tokens of his love.]

^a Dan. ix. 20—23.

^b Acts ix. 11.

^c Luke iii. 21, 22. and John xii. 28.

“While he was praying,” his form was visibly and wonderfully changed—

[In his transfiguration, as it is called, the Godhead displayed itself through the veil of his human nature, his countenance shone like the meridian sun; and his very garments were so irradiated by the lustre of the indwelling Deity, that they were white and dazzling like the light, yea, “so white as no fuller on earth could whiten them^d.” He had hitherto appeared only “in the form of a servant;” but now he appeared in his own proper form as God; at least, so far as his divine nature could be rendered visible to mortal eyes. Nor was this transfiguration intended as a mere ostentatious display of his glory: it was necessary perhaps for his support as man; that, when he should come into the scenes of his deepest humiliation, he might not faint. It was also well calculated to prepare his Disciples for that awful view of him, which they were afterwards to have, when they should see him in the garden, prostrate on the ground, bathed in a bloody sweat, and supplicating “with strong crying and tears” the removal of the cup which his Father had put into his hand.]

The history further informs us respecting,

II. His conversation with his attendants—

Moses and Elijah were sent from heaven to attend upon him—

[The body of Moses probably had been preserved, as that of Elijah had been translated to heaven, without suffering the total change which is usually effected by death. They were on this occasion arrayed “in glory,” somewhat like to their divine Master, though, of course, they were but as twinkling stars in comparison of the meridian sun. And there was a peculiar propriety that these should be selected to wait upon him, not only because they had been faithful and highly honoured servants of God, the one being the giver, and the other the restorer, of the law, but because they fitly represented the law and the prophets; and, in bearing testimony to him, resigned, as it were, their authority into his hands.]

These conversed with him respecting his own approaching death—

[One might have expected that they should have talked of heaven: but they had a subject in which all were yet more deeply interested; a subject, in which the inexhaustible treasures of divine wisdom and knowledge are contained; a subject, which fills all heaven with wonder, and which eternity itself

^d Mark. ix. 3.

will not be sufficient to unfold. Yes, that subject, universally exploded from the societies of men, was the one which occupied their attention during this delightful interview; “they spake of his decease which he should accomplish in Jerusalem.” O what do we lose by lending ourselves so entirely to other topics, and so totally discarding this! And how infatuated are men, that, even in the society of their dearest friends, they do not improve their hours by conversing on a subject of such universal importance!]

Nor were his earthly followers wholly excluded. We read of,

III. The peculiar privilege granted to some of his disciples—

Some more distinguished favourites were admitted to this heavenly vision—

[Christ has sanctified human friendships by manifesting the same attachments as are common among men. He not only chose twelve out of the body of his Disciples to be his stated followers, but admitted three of them to more peculiar intimacy than the rest: and even of these three there was one, who lay, as it were, in his bosom, and was called, by way of eminence, “The Disciple whom he loved.” But the three, who had been taken up to the mountain to spend their time in prayer, had fallen asleep, and lost thereby much of the vision, which they might have seen, and of the conversation, which they might have heard. Alas! What an irreparable loss did they sustain! Well might Jesus have said to them, “Sleep on now and take your rest.” But the effulgence of his glory roused them at last, and they both beheld this bright assemblage of persons, and heard the sublime discourse which passed between them. Happy were their eyes which saw, and their ears which heard, such things! Can we wonder that Peter should exclaim, It is good for us to be here! and that he should propose to erect tents for the accommodation of Christ and his heavenly guests, regardless of his own case, if he might but protract his present enjoyments? But though well meant, it was an ignorant proposal; for it was needful both for themselves and for the world, that they should speedily resume their wonted labours, and fulfil the work assigned them. Peter however may well be excused, for “he knew not what he said.”]

They also heard the testimony, which the Father on that occasion bore to Christ—

[While the Apostles were wishing to rest in their present comforts, they were overshadowed with a cloud, and their joys were turned into fear and dread. The cloud perhaps was like

that which guided the Israelites through the wilderness as a symbol of the Divine presence: and what can we expect, but that, as sinners, they should tremble at the near approach of the divine Majesty? But the testimony which they heard, amply compensated their transient fears: their divine Master was proclaimed as the only beloved Son of God; and they were bidden to “hear *him*,” him chiefly, him constantly, him exclusively. Such was the singular honour conferred on him: and though they were forbidden to mention it for a season, lest it should provoke their enemies to wrath, and their fellow-disciples to jealousy, yet doubtless it tended much to support them in their subsequent conflicts.]

INFER—

1. How indisputable is the truth of our holy religion—

[This was a most remarkable testimony to the character of Jesus; and it was given by God himself: and would God interpose in this manner in order to deceive? or could those Disciples be mistaken in what they so plainly saw with their eyes, and heard with their ears? Surely, strange as the tidings of the Gospel may be thought, here is evidence enough that it is “not a cunningly devised fable.” It is remarkable that St. Peter selects this very event out of the many thousands to which he was a witness, in order to establish beyond a doubt the truth of that doctrine which he preached^e. Let us then receive that Gospel which is so well authenticated, so firmly established. Let us “hear Jesus,” our divinely appointed Teacher, and make him “our beloved” Saviour, “in whom our souls are well pleased.”]

2. How diversified are the states of God’s people upon earth!

[These highly favoured Disciples were now upon the mount; but they were soon to descend into the valley again, and to go “through much tribulation in their way to the kingdom.” Thus it is with all the Lord’s people: the present is at best a chequered scene: nor is trouble ever nearer to us than when we are saying, “My mountain standeth strong; I shall never be moved^f.” Let us then be thankful for any seasons of joy; but never be so elated by them as to wish to set up tabernacles here, or to forget that we may soon experience a sad reverse: yea, let us rather improve our joys as means of strengthening us for future conflicts.]

3. What a glorious place must heaven be!

[It must have been inexpressibly delightful to have beheld, though for so short a time, this heavenly vision: but what must

^e 2 Pet. i. 16—18.

^f Ps. xxx. 6, 7.

it be to "see Jesus as he is," in all the full blaze of divine majesty; to see him, not attended with two only, but with ten thousands of his saints; and to hear, not a conversation about future sufferings, but songs of everlasting joy and triumph? What must it be to see and hear such things; ourselves resembling the Lord Jesus; our "bodies fashioned like unto his glorious body," and our souls "shining above the sun in the firmament;" our body no longer to become torpid through sloth, nor our soul to be agitated by surprise or terror; but in the perfect exercise of all our faculties to participate that glory, with a full assurance that it shall never end? Well may we *then* say, It is good for us to be here. Then we shall need no tabernacles, for "we shall dwell in the temple of our God, and shall go no more out^g." May we all be counted worthy of that honour! may we be admitted to the enjoyment of that beatific vision; that "when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, we also may appear with him in glory!"]

g Rev. iii. 12.

MDIX.

AGAINST MISTAKING OUR OWN SPIRIT.

Luke ix. 55. *Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of*

WHEN we consider what attainments men have made in science and philosophy; when we see them marshalling the stars, measuring their distances, tracing their courses, and ascertaining their influence, we are amazed at the strength of human intellect. But when we turn our eyes to their spiritual attainments, and inquire into their knowledge of their own hearts, we are altogether as much astonished at the extreme ignorance which they betray. Even godly persons have but very limited and partial views of their own principles of action. The very Apostles, who had long enjoyed the instructions of Christ himself, shewed on many occasions an unbecoming spirit, while they supposed themselves actuated by the best motives. One instance in particular we have before us, where, under a cloke of zeal for their Master's honour, they would have called down fire from heaven upon a whole village. Our Lord,

however, rebuked them in the words we have now read; from whence we shall inquire,

I. Whence is it that men are so liable to self-deception?

It is manifest, beyond a doubt, that many know not what spirit they are of—

[The various classes of *ungodly* men are universally labouring under self-deception. However they neglect every duty, or violate every commandment, they persuade themselves that, on the whole, they have good hearts; nor have they the smallest conception that they are “haters of God^a.” Even the proud persecutor, so far from accounting himself an enemy to God, will imagine that he is doing God service, while he is opposing to the utmost the Redeemer’s kingdom^b.

Nor are the *godly* themselves exempt from similar delusions, though they are influenced by them in a less degree. The zealous are sometimes inflamed with an unhallowed fire^c; and the timid induced to temporize^d. The confident will resolve, when they should rather pray for strength^e; and the faithless will harbour fears, when they should rather be enjoying their security^f.]

This propensity to self-deception is not hard to be accounted for—

1. There is a close affinity between good and evil—

[Good and evil are in their own nature as opposite as light and darkness: but, through the imperfection of our knowledge, they appear very nearly allied. Indifference assumes the garb of candour: worldliness is dignified by the name of honest industry: the fear of man puts on the mask of prudence: a vindictive spirit passes for a nice sense of honour. There is scarcely any other disposition, however sinful, which does not assume the name of some corresponding virtue, and thus conceal at least its own malignity, or perhaps obtrude itself upon the world as amiable and praise-worthy. Hence there arises a great difficulty in distinguishing between the good and the evil that there is in our own actions, since the very same thing may be either good or evil, according to the principles from whence it proceeds, and to the time, manner, or degree in which it is carried into execution.]

2. There is a backwardness in man to search out the evil that is in him—

^a Rom. i. 30. and viii. 7. Col. i. 21.

^b John xvi. 2. Acts xxvi. 9.

^c ver. 54. And many, actuated by vanity, too much resemble Jehu: 2 Kings x. 16.

^d Gal. ii. 12.

^e Matt. xxvi. 35.

^f Matt. viii. 26.

[There is in every man a self-love, which renders him averse to view his own actions in an unfavourable light; and a partiality that leads him to put the best construction upon them. If there be reason to doubt the purity of our own intentions, we do not like to bring matters to the test, and to weigh our actions in the balance of the sanctuary. If a friend attempt to undeceive us, we shrink from the probe, and would gladly avoid the painful scrutiny. Were we told that there was some hidden fire likely to consume our house, we should search into every corner, and thankfully accept every assistance to discover it, in order that it might be extinguished before it had gained too great an ascendancy. But if a friend would point out the evil of our hearts, we are glad to conceal it from his view, and to harbour, rather than detect, the lurking foe. Even in the public ministry of the word, we are apt to think how suitable such and such admonitions are for others, instead of applying them to ourselves: and hence we continue in an evil way, persuading ourselves that we are influenced by a good spirit, while our most discerning friends lament the delusions which they cannot hinder.]

It will be of no small benefit to us to consider seriously,

II. How we may counteract its baneful influence—

Doubtless, it is easier to prescribe means to others than to use them ourselves—

But, as God works by means, we would suggest such as may prove most effectual—

1. Let every grace receive a due portion of our attention—

[Many in their concern for one grace will trample upon another: in the exercise of zeal, they will forget charity; and, in maintaining confidence, will overlook humility and fear. The ungodly indeed are necessitated often to thwart one propensity, while they indulge another^g; but all the graces of Christianity may be exercised together, and in their highest perfection: every one tempers and limits that which appears opposite to it; and all, like the rays of the sun, must be combined, to produce their full effect.]

2. Let every part of Scripture be regarded with equal reverence—

^g To gratify their lusts, they must expose their character and dissipate their fortune; or if the love of reputation or of money preponderate, they must impose a restraint on their appetites.

[It is astonishing how irreverently even good persons will sometimes treat those portions of Scripture which militate against their sentiments or practice. The plainest declarations of God are considered as "hard sayings," and are slighted, either as impracticable in themselves, or as inapplicable to their case. But we must be careful to receive every word of God; and to improve it as "a light to our feet and a lantern to our paths:" for it is only "by taking heed to it" that we can ever effectually "cleanse our way^h."]]

3. Let Christ be set before us as our pattern and example—

[Wherever we can trace the steps of our blessed Lord, there we are to follow^l. There were indeed some things in him which would not become us, because we are not called to the high office which he sustained. But the spirit of his actions should be copied by us, even where the actions themselves would not be proper for our imitation. We should not attempt to fast forty days and forty nights; but we should exercise self-denial. Nor should we speak of rulers in reproachful terms^k; but we should be bold and faithful in the discharge of our duty. In doubtful circumstances it will be profitable to consider what he would have done if he had been precisely in our situation. By thus divesting ourselves of partiality, and proposing to ourselves his perfect pattern, we shall have our judgment assisted, and our conduct rectified.]]

4. Let us lean to the side that mortifies, rather than to that which suits, our natural inclination—

[In the present corrupt state of human nature, we shall rarely, if ever, find our natural desires drawing with precision our line of duty. *Self* has too strong a bias, even where its tendencies most accord with the word of God: nor does it ever fail to operate in some measure. If therefore we lean to that side, we may be hurried, before we are aware, to great extremes, without any prospect of recovery. But if we lean rather to the opposite side, we are in no danger of being transported *much* too far; and we have a bias uniformly operating to bring us back to the line of moderation. This rule is founded on the supposition that our natural inclinations may, in some instances, prescribe what is right. But, in cases where the line of duty is at all doubtful, it will invariably be found safer at least, and in all human probability the *only* right way, to oppose and mortify self.]]

5. Let us keep our minds open to conviction—

^h Ps. cxix. 9.

ⁱ 1 John ii. 6. 1 Pet. ii. 21.

^k Luke xiii. 32. Acts xxiii. 5.

[If we will at all events conclude ourselves right, there is no hope of our being ever undeceived. We must be willing to suspect ourselves, and to listen to the counsel of our friends. Even Peter needed correction from his brother Paul¹; and the duty of “teaching and admonishing one another^m,” necessarily implies a readiness to receive, as well as to impart, fraternal admonition. And if we cultivate this disposition, we shall often be preserved from evils into which we might have rushed, and have reason to adore our God for the advice we have receivedⁿ.]

6. Let us pray constantly to God to search and try us—

[Our treacherous hearts can put such glosses on our conduct as to deceive both ourselves and others: but they cannot deceive God. “He searcheth the heart, and trieth the reins:” he “weigheth the spirits;” and discerns with infallible certainty the smallest mixtures of evil, and the minutest deviations from his holy law. And, as he beholds, so he can discover to us, the secret workings of our own corruptions. If he shine into our hearts, we shall be astonished to see the delusions which we have held fast perhaps for many years, and of which our dearest friends could never convince us! Let us then pray to him to search and try the very ground of our hearts^o; and he will not only make our senses more acute to discern good and evil^p, but will keep our feet in the way of his commandments^q.]

¹ Gal. ii. 11.

^m Col. iii. 16.

ⁿ 1 Sam. xxv. 32, 33.

^o Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24.

^p Heb. v. 14.

^q 1 Sam. ii. 9.

MDX.

APPROPRIATE ADDRESSES TO DISTINCT CHARACTERS.

Luke ix. 57—62. *It came to pass, that, as they went in the way, a certain man said unto him, Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head. And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God. And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house. And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.*

TO investigate and unfold the expressions of Holy Writ is an office in the discharge of which a minister renders most essential service to the Church of God: and hence it constitutes a very great portion of a minister's labours; so far, at least, as respects his public addresses to his people. But the eliciting of characters, as portrayed in the inspired volume, is also a work of great importance; inasmuch as it enables a multitude of persons to behold themselves, as it were in a glass, and to arrange themselves under the different classes to which they belong. It is this latter office which I shall endeavour to discharge at this time. Here are three distinct characters brought to our view, with distinct addresses to each. On the particular terms that are used, I shall say but little; my intention being rather to take the subject in one collective view, and to suggest reflections upon it as a whole.

Let us, then, contemplate,

I. The characters here presented to our view—

They all express different measures of regard for Christ and his Gospel: the first is all willingness; the second is all reluctance; the third is a compound of the two former, being partly willing, and partly reluctant, to obey the Gospel call.

The first professes the utmost willingness to follow Christ—

[“Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest.” This is well spoken, on a supposition that it convey the deliberate purpose of the heart. Such a state of mind as this is a counterpart of heaven itself; where all the redeemed are said “to follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth^a.” But, from the answer of our Lord to him, it is evident that the man knew not what he was undertaking. He had not considered what conflicts he would have to maintain, what sacrifices to make, what self-denial to exercise. The very confidence with which he expressed himself argued a sad ignorance of his own heart, and a very partial acquaintance with the duties which he was so ready to engage in. He seems to have been under an impression that the Lord Jesus was about to establish a temporal kingdom; and, like the mother of Zebedee's children, to have

^a Rev. xiv. 4.

contemplated a pre-eminence amongst his followers, as a post of worldly honour, and of enviable preferment.

Now, amongst ourselves, also, there are many who are under a similar delusion. They think of nothing in religion, but its joys and honours. As for “entering into it by a strait gate,” and finding it “a narrow way,” they seem never for a moment to have contemplated it in such a forbidding aspect. Like the stony-ground hearers, they have received the word with delight, and appear at once to experience all its fructifying powers. In a moment, as it were, they seem to have attained a high measure of grace, and to have made a considerable proficiency in the divine life: but their want of “root in themselves” will soon be made manifest, and their profession speedily be found to have been nothing but an empty boast.]

The second manifests a great degree of unwillingness—

[It is here particularly to be noticed, that, this second character had received from Christ an express command, “Follow me.” This, therefore, should have been obeyed in the way that Matthew had obeyed it at the receipt of custom, and the sons of Zebedee amidst their father’s nets. But he pleads for delay, as feeling that he had an occupation which, at the present at least, was of superior importance. Whether his father was really dead, or only aged and in dying circumstances, is, amongst commentators, a matter of doubt. I confess I incline rather to the latter opinion; because the circumstance of his being engaged in attending the ministry of our Lord at that time, in a country where the funeral followed so closely on a man’s decease, gives just reason to think that his father, though aged or sick, was yet alive: and in this view, the apparent harshness of our Lord’s answer vanishes at once. There were persons in plenty to perform the last offices for his father; and, however commendable the exercise of filial attention was, the immediate call of God was of sufficient authority to supersede it; and “to love father or mother more than Christ,” was to shew that he was “unworthy of the kingdom of God.”

But of this description, also, are many amongst ourselves. They may, possibly, really feel the obligations due to parents: but, in making filial duty a plea for delaying to obey the Gospel, they betray a total ignorance of what they owe to God. It is said of Levi, that, when commanded to go through the camp and slay the worshippers of the golden calf, he executed the commission without any partiality or reserve: “he said to his father and to his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor know his own children^b.”

^b Exod. xxxii. 26—28. Deut. xxxiii. 9.

And, however self-denying the office to which we are called may be, we are to discharge it instantly, without deference or regard to any human being. But many who hear the Gospel, and acknowledge their obligation to obey it, are yet kept back, from a mistaken idea, that respect even for a father, and that father in the most trying circumstances, will justify a delay in obeying the call of God. In saying, "Suffer me *first* to do" any thing under heaven, they actually rebel against God; who commands us "to seek *first* the kingdom of God and his righteousness," and to "*hate* even father and mother" in comparison of Christ^c.]

The third professes a willingness to follow Christ, but pleads for permission to delay it—

[It is probable that the person who desired to "go home and bid farewell to his friends" had in his view the history of Elisha, who had made this request to Elijah, and received his permission to execute his wish^d. But the danger which this man would encounter was incomparably greater than Elisha's; for he might be sure that his friends would exert all their powers to divert him from his purpose.

A similar mistake proves fatal to multitudes at the present day. They wish to conciliate the regards of their earthly relatives, and for that end subject themselves to temptations which they are not able to withstand. Their friends know not how to give them up to follow a course which, to say the least, is so unpopular, and, with respect to this world, unproductive also; and, in order to retain their hold of their vacillating friend, they use every effort of intimidation, of raillery, of contempt: and thus they prevail on the unstable Christian to relinquish his holy profession, and to go back again to the world.]

These several characters will appear in their true light, whilst we consider,

II. The appropriate answers successively addressed to them—

To the first, our Lord sets forth the difficulties attendant on the Christian life—

[The man, it should seem, had expected little but outward prosperity; and our Lord informs him how unfounded this expectation was; since he himself, though Lord of all, was destitute of every earthly accommodation: and it could not be expected that "the servant should be above his Lord." The same would I say to those who are forward to engage in a profession of religion, and to number themselves amongst the

^c Luke xiv. 26

^d 1 Kings xix. 20.

Lord's people. In making such a profession, you are incomparably more likely to meet with want and shame, than fulness and honour. The Apostles of our Lord, and particularly the Apostle Paul, were exposed to cold, and hunger, and nakedness, and perils of every kind: and thousands of others, in different ages of the Church, have been called to experience the same: and though persecution for righteousness' sake is not carried to the same extent amongst us, we are not authorized to expect any earthly comfort, of which the men of this world can deprive us. A pre-eminence in our Lord's kingdom will, in the eyes of the ungodly, entitle us to nothing but pre-eminence in sufferings and reproach. And the man that will not follow religion on these terms must relinquish Christ altogether: for "if we take not up our cross daily to follow him, we cannot be his disciples." Let every one, therefore, that would be saved by Christ, be prepared to participate with Christ in his wants and sufferings; and let him "follow Christ without the camp, bearing his reproach," yea, and "glorying that he is counted worthy to suffer shame for His sake."]

To the next, our Lord declares that every consideration under heaven must give way, when we are plainly called to serve and honour him—

[This I conceive to be the real meaning of that expression, "Let the dead bury their dead." Our Lord did not mean to discourage the performance of our relative duties, and least of all the duties which we owe to our parents. Both the Law and the Gospel concur in this, even in enforcing obedience to earthly parents. This was "the first commandment with promise;" and, "if we obey it not," whatever we may profess, "we are worse than infidels." But our duty to God is of paramount obligation. And, if we say, Who then shall perform the duties which we neglect? I answer, There will always be found enough of worldly people to attend to worldly duties: and we may well leave them to discharge what they supremely affect. We may "leave the dead to bury their dead." If we have a clear call to preach the Gospel, or to embrace it in such a way as shall be incompatible with those carnal occupations which may as well be performed by others, we may well leave those occupations to others; and, at all events, *we must never so follow them as to let them interfere with the discharge of our higher duties*: and if any one blame us for this, our answer must be, "Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye: for we cannot but do the things which he requires."]

To the last, our Lord administered a solemn caution—

[It seemed that this person was more sincere than the others; though still by no means sufficiently aware of the

danger to which, by the step which he contemplated, he would be exposed. The man who would finally be accepted of God, must "not only set out well, but must endure unto the end." He must take care of hankering after the flesh-pots of Egypt, which he has left. "Lot's wife" is a standing monument to all ages, and warns us all, not so much as to cast a look of regret at the vanities we have once renounced. A man at plough will execute his work but ill, if he look back in the midst of it: and a man who is working for eternity will never be judged fit for the kingdom of God, if he be not continually intent upon that which is before him, and carefully prosecuting his destined work. Let those, therefore, who plead for worldly gratifications, consider their tendency, and dread their effects. I grant that there are many things both seemly and innocent, if abstractedly considered, which yet a man in earnest for heaven will do well to avoid; lest by means of them he should be ensnared, and diverted from his proper course. The man in a race will not only free himself from encumbrances, but will gird about his loins the garment that would obstruct his way. And in like manner we also should "cast away every weight, and the sin which either does, or may, more easily beset us, and run with patience the race that is set before us." It were "better never to have known the commandment at all, than, after having known it, to depart from it.]"

Permit me, then, to recommend to every one of you,

1. Consideration—

[Take not up religion in a light and thoughtless way; but consider carefully, what duties it prescribes, what exertions it requires, what sufferings it entails; and, "before you begin to build the tower, sit down and count the cost, and see whether you have wherewith to finish it." If you will possess "the pearl of great price, you must sell all that you have, and buy it.]"

2. Decision—

[Whether you be of a higher or a lower rank, it matters not; you shall surely find, that if you will live godly in Christ Jesus, you shall suffer persecution. David experienced this, after he sat on the throne, no less than whilst he fled from the face of Saul. You must expect it. You must expect it in its utmost possible extent, even to martyrdom itself. And you must be "ready either to be bound or die for the name of the Lord Jesus," if such a sacrifice should be called for at your hands. In nothing must you "consult with flesh and blood." To "follow the Lord fully" must be the one deliberate and determined purpose of your soul.]

3. Constancy—

[Never are you to be weary of well-doing. "If you draw

back, God can have no pleasure in you:" "you will draw back to certain and everlasting perdition." You must "be faithful unto death, if ever you would obtain a crown of life:" "he only, that endureth unto the end, ever will, or ever can, be saved."]

MDXI.

AGAINST A DISPOSITION TO RELINQUISH THE LORD'S
SERVICE.

Luke ix. 62. *Jesus said unto him, No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.*

SO infinitely important is the service of God, that nothing can ever justify the withdrawing of ourselves from it, or the relaxing of our diligence in the discharge of our proper office. However innocent any earthly employment may be, yea, however decorous, or even necessary, in its place, it must give way to the more urgent calls of our duty to God. Of this our Lord constantly warned his hearers, in order that they might fully count the cost before they became his followers. His answers to three different persons upon this subject are worthy of our particular attention: to the first, who *voluntarily tendered to him his services*, he replied, that he must expect no worldly advantages in following him, but rather lay his account to meet with poverty and disgrace. In his address to the second, *whom he had enjoined to follow him*, and who wished to defer his obedience till he should have performed the last offices for his deceased father, our Lord required him to leave those offices to others, who were not occupied in higher pursuits, and instantly to comply with the direction given him; because *nothing, however proper in itself, should interfere with the execution of a positive command*. To the last, he gave this caution; that since his earthly relatives would most probably prove a snare to him under his present circumstances, he must make up his mind to forsake all for him; for that a wavering mind would unfit him both for the service of God on earth, and the enjoyment of God in heaven.

The request of this last person seems to have brought to our Lord's mind the circumstances of Elisha, when he was called to serve Elijah: and it is to Elisha's occupation that our Lord alludes in the answer he gave him^a. From his words we may deduce two important observations:

I. When we engage in God's service, we should determine, through grace, to continue in it—

When we “put our hand to the plough” we engage in God's service—

[It is obvious that, as God's creatures, and more particularly as redeemed by the blood of his dear Son, we are bound to serve and obey him. Now the obedience which he requires, is, that we renounce the world, and mortify sin, and yield up ourselves to him unfeignedly, and without reserve. And when we begin to make a profession of religion, we do, *in fact*, declare, that henceforth we will walk conformably to the example of Christ, and the precepts of his Gospel. Our very putting of our hand to the plough is, as it were, a public declaration of our intention to prosecute and finish the work assigned us by our divine Master.]

But it is of no use to begin the Lord's work, if we do not resolutely adhere to it—

[When first we turn to the Lord, we propose to ourselves two ends, namely, to glorify God, and to save our own souls: and while we continue faithful to our engagements, we find no reason to complain of disappointment. But the very instant we recede from our work, we proclaim, as it were, to all around us, ‘I have tried religion, and found it but an empty name: I have served the Lord, and experienced him to be a hard Master: I have weighed the world and its services in a balance with God and his service; and I bear my testimony, that the world deserves our preference.’ By such conduct as this a person pulls down all that he has built: he brings incomparably more dishonour to God than ever he brought glory, and sinks his soul into a far deeper condemnation, than if he had never known the way of righteousness^b. As a man who should begin to plough, would render himself of no use, if he should relinquish his work as soon as he had proceeded to the end of a single furrow; so an apostate from religion renders his divine Master no service by a temporary obedience, but rather defeats, yea, most completely reverses, the ends proposed.]

^a 1 Kings xix. 19, 20.

^b Ezek. xviii. 24. 2 Pet. ii. 21.

Nor is it an open apostasy only from our holy profession that is so fatal to us: for,

II. A disposition to recede from it manifests us to be unfit for the kingdom of God—

Not he only who indignantly throws away the plough, but he who, while he still professes to do the Lord's work, is "looking back" with a wishful eye upon the world, is in the state here mentioned. He is unfit for,

1. The kingdom of God on earth—

[This is the primary import of the words of the text: nor can any thing be more clear than the truth contained in them. The service of Christ, whether in ministering the word to others, or in obeying it ourselves, requires steadfastness. We cannot adhere to Christ without opposing in many instances our carnal appetites, and worldly interests; as therefore a man, who, instead of attending to his plough, looks frequently behind him, would soon prove himself unfit for the service in which he was engaged, so he who should undertake to serve the Lord Christ, while his heart was yet set upon the world, would walk very unworthily of his profession, and soon shew himself unfit to execute the office assigned him. Like a bowl sent forth with violence, he might go steadily for a season; but he would ere long feel the influence of the corrupt bias that was within him, and, like "Demas, forsake the way of truth from love to this present evil world." He must "be sincere, if he would be without offence until the day of Christ."]]

2. The kingdom of God in heaven—

[If any person be disposed to look back, after having put his hand to the plough, he shews, that he has not a supreme love to God, nor any real delight in holy ordinances, nor any resemblance to the characters of the saints of old. Look at Abraham, at Moses, at Paul, or any others recorded in the Scripture; they left all for Christ, "counting every thing to be dung and dross for him," and "esteeming even the reproach of Christ to be greater riches than all the treasures of the world;" nor could even death, in its most formidable shapes, divert them from their purpose to serve and honour him^c. But how unlike to them are the irresolute and unstable! and how incapable of enjoying heaven even if they were there! Could they be happy in God when they do not supremely love him? Would they not rather dread his presence from a consciousness that their hearts were known to him? Could

^c Heb. xi. 8, 24, 25, 26, 37. Acts xx. 24. and xxi. 13.

they bear to spend an eternity in those employments for which they have no relish? would not their exercises be an irksome task, and an intolerable burthen? Could they have sweet communion with the glorified saints when they differ so widely from them? Would they not rather be so condemned in their consciences as even to wish themselves out of their society? Surely a wavering professor of religion is alike unfit for the church militant, and the church triumphant.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who never put their hands to the plough—

[How many are there who never set themselves in earnest to do the will of God, or even take pains to inquire what the will of God is! But such will comfort themselves with the reflection, that they are neither hypocrites nor apostates. Alas! how poor a consolation is this! Be it so; you have never made any profession of religion at all: but is that a ground of satisfaction and boasting? What must you say, but this? “Here is one, who has cast off all allegiance to his Maker, and lives without God in the world.” Ah! glory not in such a distinction as this: for, whoever ye be, God has assigned you a work to do, and will call you to give an account of your talent: and if you have hid it in a napkin, he will “cast you, as an unprofitable servant, into outer darkness.” May God open your eyes, and interest you in his service ere it be too late!]

2. To those who, having put their hands to the plough, are disposed to look back—

[We are apt to think lightly of secret declensions, if we do not openly apostatize from the truth. But what was it that rendered Lot's wife such an object of God's displeasure? Did she go back to Sodom, or refuse to proceed with the angel to the destined place of safety? No; she *looked* back, and thereby shewed, that her heart was not thoroughly weaned from the things which she had left behind: and on this account it was, that she was instantly transformed into a pillar of salt, and made a monument of God's wrath and indignation to all succeeding ages^d. To impress this instructive lesson on our minds, our Lord bids us “remember Lot's wife^e,” and it will be well to bear her ever in our minds, since, if we turn back, it will be unto perdition^f; and our last end will be worse than the beginning^g. We must endure to the end if ever we would be saved^h.]

3. To those who are determined, through grace, to persevere in their work—

^d Gen. xix. 26

^e Luke xvii. 32.

^f Heb. x. 38, 39.

^g 2 Pet. ii. 20.

^h Matt. xxiv. 13.

[Doubtless the work will often prove heavy and fatiguing. But God has promised “grace sufficient for us.” And the more we labour, the greater our rewardⁱ. Yea, the very work itself is a source of much peace and joy^k, and wonderfully conduces to fit us both for this world and the next. Who will make so distinguished a preacher of Christ, or will so adorn his Christian profession, as he who is altogether dead to the world? And who is so fit to join the saints above, as he who already emulates them in their love to God, and their delight in holy exercises? Go on then, “forgetting what is behind, and reaching forth to that which is before^l;” and soon you shall both “rest from your labours,” and “enter into the joy of your Lord.”]

ⁱ 1 Cor. iii. 8.^k Isai. xxxii. 17.^l Phil. iii. 13, 14.

MDXII.

THE DANGER OF REJECTING THE GOSPEL.

LUKE X. 10—16. *Into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you not, go your ways out into the streets of the same, and say, Even the very dust of your city which cleaveth on us, we do wipe off against you: notwithstanding be ye sure of this, that the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you. But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable in that day for Sodom, than for that city. Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon, which have been done in you, they had a great while ago repented, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven, shalt be thrust down to hell. He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me.*

NOTWITHSTANDING all the care which our Lord took to prepare the minds of men for the reception of his Gospel, his success was very small, insomuch that after his resurrection and ascension to heaven, his disciples amounted to no more than five hundred. He foresaw it would be so; and when sending forth his seventy disciples into all the places whither he himself was about to come, he guarded them against the offence which the contracted influence of his word might occasion. He directed

them how to act towards any city which should not receive them: they should express towards its inhabitants the indignation of God, and should make known to them both their iniquity and their folly. In confirmation of what he instructed them to do, he himself denounced his judgments against the cities that had rejected *him*; and then proceeded to give a general admonition to all to whom his Gospel should come.

Were we addressing ministers, we should consider the subject more immediately in relation to *them*: but in an address intended only for private Christians, it will be more profitable to wave what relates to the conduct of the ministry, and to suggest rather such reflections as are applicable to mankind at large, especially that part of them which is disobedient to the Gospel of Christ.

I. How awful is their obduracy!

[Our Lord complained that the cities to which he had ministered had resisted such means as, if used for the awakening of the inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon, or even of Sodom and Gomorrah, would have been effectual to bring them to repentance: "they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes." Now, without stopping to inquire, why God withheld from Sodom the means of grace which would have been effectual, and vouchsafed them to Jewish cities, where he knew they would not be effectual, (a question which no human wisdom can solve,) we would call your attention to this fact as illustrated in the present day.

We acknowledge that the hearers of our Lord had many and great advantages which we have not: but on the other hand, we have great advantages which they had not. We admit, that they were instructed by One who "spake as never man spake;" and that they saw the mighty works which he wrought in confirmation of his word: but on the other hand, the meanness of his appearance and of his followers was a stumbling-block, which it was exceeding difficult to get over, and which is entirely removed out of our way. Besides, they saw the plan of Christianity only in a very obscure and partial light; whereas we see it in all its fulness and completion: and the evidence we have from that great miracle of all, his resurrection from the dead, is stronger than all those which they beheld. We may, therefore, justly say that our advantages are greater than theirs: and yet multitudes hear the Gospel now, and are unmoved by it: some sneer at it as folly and enthusiasm; and

others rest in a mere formal profession of it, without any experience of its transforming power. What then shall we say of them? Are not they blind and hardened in a very awful degree? Are not they also more obdurate than the idolatrous Syrians, or the filthy Sodomites? Yes: far less evidence, and an obscurer statement of the Gospel, would have brought *them* to “repent in dust and ashes;” whereas the unbelievers of the present day are proof against an accumulated weight of evidence, and against the full splendour of evangelic truth.

Let this then be considered by us: and when we wonder at the blindness and obduracy of the Jews, let us remember how blind we ourselves have been, and how unaffected by the most stupendous miracles of love and mercy that ever were vouchsafed to men.]

II. How heinous their guilt!

[Unbelief is in general scarcely ever thought of as a sin: the open infidel justifies himself by a pretended want of evidence; and those who maintain a form of religion fancy themselves possessed of saving faith: so that, whatever men have to condemn in their own conduct, they never think of bemoaning their *unbelief*. But behold what was Christ’s judgment respecting this! He considered unbelief as a more heinous sin than any which Tyre and Sidon, or even Sodom and Gomorrha, had committed, and as involving his hearers in a deeper condemnation than any to which the vilest of those cities would be doomed. He also commanded his Disciples to “wipe off the dust from their feet against those who received them not,” in token of God’s indignation against them, and his abandoning of them to the evil of their own ways^a. Nor can we wonder at it, when Christ and his Father identify themselves with all the ministers of the Gospel: “He that heareth you, heareth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me; and he that despiseth me, despiseth him that sent me.” What a view does this representation give us of unbelief! And how little idea have the unbelieving world of the light in which they are regarded by a holy God! But when once the Holy Ghost is sent into their hearts to convince them of sin, they become convinced of this sin in particular; and view it in its proper colours, as a mixture of ignorance, impiety, and rebellion.

Let the towering imaginations of the formalist then fall to the ground: let the most decent amongst us see what guilt he has contracted: and let every one acknowledge that God is just in consigning over to perdition those who, either in theory or in practice, reject Christ, and thus eventually “make God himself a liar.”]

^a Acts xiii. 51.

III. How great their folly!

[The seventy Disciples were especially commanded to testify to those who rejected them, that the contempt which they manifested for their message did not at all invalidate the truth or importance of it: "Notwithstanding, be ye sure of this, that the kingdom of God is come unto you." Thus must we say to those who disregard the Gospel: "Your unbelief cannot make the faith of God of none effect." If your neglect of the Gospel could set aside its authority, so that you should stand excused for your disobedience to it, your folly would not be so great: but you cannot alter one single word in it: Christ will still be the only Saviour of the world, though you should pour ever so much contempt upon him: and faith in his name will be the only means of obtaining an interest in him, though you should dispute ever so much against it: and that declaration, "He that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned," will be carried into execution, however you may complain of its harshness and severity. The ridicule and contempt poured on Noah whilst building the ark, did not at all affect the truth of his warnings: the flood came precisely as he had foretold, and swept away all the inhabitants of the earth. And so will it be in the day of judgment: the Gospel will prove true, and its sanctions will be executed, "whether men will hear it or whether they forbear." What folly and madness then is it to trifle thus with the words of life! Common sense, methinks, should lead men to consider what they hear, and to search the Scriptures daily whether these things be so. If they can disprove the truth of the Gospel, well: let them then despise it if they please: but if they cannot disprove it, let them obey it; and that not in a partial and formal manner, but unreservedly, and with their whole hearts.]

IV. How pitiable their condition!

[Could we behold the present state of those who once inhabited Sodom and Gomorrha; could we see their weeping, their wailing, their gnashing of teeth, how would our bowels yearn over them! Yet, grievous as their condition is, it is more tolerable than that which is prepared for the despisers of the Gospel. This is not declared once, but often; and that, too, by HIM who will assign to all their proper doom. Say, then, whether we should not be filled with pity towards the thoughtless, deceived, and deceiving world? Suppose them enjoying all that earth can give; yet, with such prospects before them, who must not regard them as objects of the tenderest compassion? Behold a man just about to be racked upon the wheel, or to be burned on a slow consuming fire; give him what you will preparatory to his sufferings, you cannot but view him with most heartfelt grief. Thus then should we

view the contemners of Christ, whether they manifest that contempt in a way of open infidelity or of secret disaffection. There will be degrees of misery, indeed, proportioned to the degrees of guilt which each has contracted; but the least miserable of those who perish under the light of the Gospel, will have a heavier doom than shall ever fall to the lot of Sodom and Gomorrhah. O that our head were a fountain of tears to run down for them night and day; and that we might labour, all of us, whilst yet there is time, to pluck them as brands out of the burning!]

ADVICE—

1. Let all who hear the Gospel *consider their responsibility*—

[The generality think little but of hearing such or such a *man*: but be it known to you, that the word you hear is “not the word of *man*, but of *God*,” and is to be so received, if it be agreeable to his revealed will. You know that an ambassador is the representative of his king, and that the reception or rejection of his message is considered as affecting, not him, but his master who sent him. So it is with the ambassadors of Christ^b— — O that whenever we attend upon the house of God, we might attend as if Christ himself were come down to instruct us, or as if God the Father spoke to us by an audible voice from heaven!]

2. Let them *improve their privileges*—

[It is an inestimable privilege to have the Gospel faithfully administered to us. What if Sodom and Gomorrhah had enjoyed that privilege? *they* would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes, and would probably “have remained to this very day.” So, if millions that are now in hell had heard what we have, they would perhaps have obeyed the truth and been saved by it. We are sure that many have made a far better improvement of it than we; and therefore we should humble ourselves on a view of our unprofitableness, and labour to bring forth fruits worthy of the culture bestowed upon us.]

^b Text, with John xiii. 20.

MDXIII.

THE ENROLMENT OF OUR NAMES IN HEAVEN, A GROUND OF JOY.

Luke x. 20. *Notwithstanding, in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.*

THERE is a holy jealousy which well becomes the ministers of God: for people are ever ready to pride themselves upon any distinctions which God may confer upon them, and to rest in the attainments they have made, instead of regarding them only as means to an ulterior good. It should seem that the seventy Disciples, who had been sent forth to preach the Gospel of the kingdom, were surprised when they found that devils and unclean spirits were subject unto them: and on their return to their divine Master, they could not help expressing the high gratification which this power had afforded them. Had their minds been more suitably affected, they would have rejoiced rather in the prospect which that circumstance afforded them of the final triumphs of their Lord. Jesus therefore, in a kind and tender manner, corrected their views, and pointed out to them a more just ground of self-congratulation: assuring them in the mean time that their powers should be still more enlarged, and their victory over Satan be more complete. The caution given to them is applicable to Christians in every age: their comforts and successes are doubtless a proper subject of joy and thankfulness; but it is the final success only that can make them completely happy; and the only solid joy is that which arises from a well-founded expectation of happiness beyond the grave.

In confirmation of this truth, we would observe,

I. That the enrolment of our names in heaven is a fact which may be known—

The names of all God's people are, as it were, written in his book—

[The names of all the tribes of Israel were registered in a book. It was of that book that Moses spake, when he desired God to blot him out of it rather than not forgive his offending people^a. And as long as the Jewish states continued, such a book was carefully preserved^b. Such a register God himself is represented as having formed of all his chosen people. His book is called "the book of life, of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world^c." This book, as well as the books of

^a Exod. xxxii. 32.

^b Isai. iv. 3.

^c Rev. xiii. 8.

God's remembrance, in which the actions of men were recorded, will be brought forth at the last day^d; and they who were written in it will be exalted to glory^e, whilst "those who were not written in it will be cast into the lake of fire, which is the second death^f."]

Our enrolment in that book is a fact which may be known—

[St. Paul knew it respecting many, both men and women, who had united with him in endeavours to advance the kingdom of Christ^g. And the same may be known also by those who are there enrolled. We cannot indeed go up to heaven to examine that sacred record; nor can we have it brought down to us on earth: yet may we assuredly know its contents as far as respects ourselves. There are two ways in which this may be done; first, by the testimony of the Spirit; and next, by the evidence of our lives. Respecting the witness of the Spirit, we do not say that the Spirit will bear any direct testimony to our souls, *irrespective of any thing that he has wrought in us*; (this I conceive to be a very dangerous error;) but he will shine upon his own work, and cause us to see it. *When we are regenerate*, he will, as "a Spirit of adoption, enable us to cry, Abba, Father;" and will "witness *with our spirits* that we are the children of God, and heirs of his everlasting kingdom^h." *When we are regenerate*, I say, he will do this, but not before; for he never did, nor can, attest a falsehood, which he would do if he were to witness to any unregenerate man that he was a child of God. The evidence of our own lives also will enable us to ascertain this fact. There are certain "things which infallibly accompany salvationⁱ," and which therefore warrant us to infer that we are in the number of God's elect^k, and to assure ourselves of a final and everlasting acceptance with him^l. The former is the more delightful to our feelings; the latter is the more convincing to our judgment: but from whichever source we draw our conclusions, if only our premises be right, our conclusions are infallible. Hence St. Paul was so assured of happiness in the eternal world^m; and hence every believer is authorized to adopt the words of the Church of old, "My beloved is mine, and I am his."]

Having shewn that the fact of our enrolment in heaven may be known, we observe,

^d Rev. xx. 12.

^e Rev. xxi. 27.

^f Rev. xx. 15.

^g Phil. iv. 3.

^h Rom. viii. 15—17.

ⁱ Heb. vi. 9, 10.

^k 1 Thess. i. 3, 4.

^l 1 John iii. 11, 18—21.

^m 2 Cor. v. 1. 2 Tim. iv. 8.

II. That when known, it is a ground of most exalted joy—

The expulsion of devils from the bodies of men was a just ground of joy—

[It was an evidence of God's presence with the Disciples; (for who but God could cast them out?) it was also a strong confirmation of their word; (no stronger could be given:) it was, moreover, an unspeakable blessing to those who were thus delivered from Satan's power; (and who must not rejoice in the communication of so great a good?) above all, it was a pledge of greater victories over Satan, and the utter destruction of his kingdom. Our Lord's prohibition, therefore, must not be understood as absolute, but only as comparative; as when he bade his followers "not to labour for the meat that perisheth, but for that which endureth unto everlasting life."]

But the knowledge of our interest in the Divine favour is incomparably a greater ground of joy—

[Indeed nothing can for a moment be put in competition with this: this is infinitely beyond every other ground of joy.

It is *the most sublime*. What is the possession of thrones and kingdoms in comparison of this? All earthly things are lighter than vanity itself when weighed against the glories of the heavenly worldⁿ.

It is *the most pure*. Every earthly joy has a tendency to corrupt the mind; to fill us with pride; to foster every evil disposition; to rivet us to the world; and to retard our progress toward the kingdom of heaven. But who was ever corrupted by a view of his interest in the Saviour? We do not ask, When did a corrupt man pretend to an interest in Christ, or boast that he was of the number of God's elect? for that, alas! may be found in every place and every age; but we confidently ask, Whom did the knowledge of his interest in Christ ever corrupt in any respect whatever? Ignorant people imagine that a view of our election of God will puff us up with pride; or render us indifferent to the attainment of holiness: but every child of God is the more humbled by a conviction that God is pacified towards him^o, and is the more determinately bent to fulfil the whole will of God. Of this we are assured on the authority of an inspired Apostle, on whose testimony we may rely with most implicit confidence^p—

It is *the most substantial*. Whatever other sources of joy we may have, they may all fail and disappoint us. Ask those who have attained the principal objects of their desire, whether

ⁿ See the description of the Christian's state, Heb. xii. 22—24.

^o Ezek. xvi. 63.

^p 1 John iii. 3.

they have found all the satisfaction in them that they once expected? and they will all be constrained to acknowledge, that vanity and vexation of spirit is the sum of all created good. In a little time our sweetest enjoyments cloy, and cease to afford us any material gratification: in a season of deep affliction they lose all their power, and are not unfrequently turned into sources of the greatest sorrow. But whom did the pardoning love of Christ ever fail to comfort? Who ever ceased to derive consolation from it under the heaviest afflictions? Who ever found it a source or an occasion of sorrow to his soul, except indeed that he sorrowed because he did not value it more, and improve it better? Other joys embitter the thought of death, and vanish the moment that the soul takes its flight from the body: but the knowledge of our acceptance with God makes the thought of death delightful; and the joy arising from it is perfected in the very instant of our departure hence. Lastly,

It is *that, without which no other ground of joy can exist.* We will suppose that you possess health, and riches, and wisdom, and honour, and every gratification that your heart can wish, and that too in the highest degree that it can be enjoyed; what is it all, whilst you have no prospect beyond the grave? If you were sensible of your state, you would be like a person sitting down to a banquet, with a sword suspended over his head by a single hair; you would not know one moment's peace. Who would envy a man, that after a few hours was to be burnt alive? Whatever he might possess, he would be regarded by all as a pitiable object: and such is that man who, after a few more days, must be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone: whatever of wealth or honour he may have attained, he is a wretched creature, and if he be at all sensible of his state, he would gladly exchange conditions with the meanest and most afflicted saint on earth.

What comparison then will earthly joys bear with this? Even that of casting out devils, and finding them subject to one's power, would be nothing, when it is considered that the person so honoured may soon be cast out himself, and bidden to "depart accursed into everlasting fire⁹."]

LEARN then,

1. To seek this great blessing above all things—

[Some may be ready to say, 'If God has not, of his own sovereign grace, inscribed my name in his book from all eternity, how shall I get it done now?' To this I answer, The secret decrees of God are no ground of action to you: you are to act precisely as if all depended on your own personal exertion: nay,

⁹ Matt. vii. 22, 23.

more, God encourages you so to act, with an assurance that you shall not exert yourself in vain. Go to the Lord Jesus Christ, and cast yourselves at the foot of his cross, and then see whether it shall be in vain. He has said, that "Whosoever cometh unto him, he will in no wise cast out;" and you may rest assured, that that promise shall be fulfilled to you. However distant you have been from God, you shall be "brought nigh to him by the blood of the cross;" and "from being strangers and foreigners, you shall become fellow-citizens of the saints, and of the household of God^r." This blessing it is your duty to seek in God's appointed way; and if it be, as we have shewn, incomparably the greatest that a human being can possess, seek it with an earnestness proportioned to its worth — — —]

2. Never to grow weary in the pursuit of it—

[Many persons are fond of perplexing themselves with the deeper doctrines of religion, when they should rather be edifying themselves with those which are more plain. Some will argue, that if God have written our names in his book, he will never blot them out again, because "his gifts and calling are without repentance." But though it is true, that "God will carry on his work," and "perfect that which concerneth us," it is equally true, that "if we draw back, we draw back unto perdition, and God's soul will have no pleasure in us^s." Of his faithful people he has said, that "he will not blot out their names from the book of life^t:" but he uses directly opposite language in reference to the ungodly, and to those who decline from his ways^u. It is "to them who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory and honour, and immortality, that God will give eternal life^x." Let no difficulties then discourage you; but "press forward for the prize of your high calling:" and expect assuredly, that, as already "your witness is in heaven, and your record is on high^y," so your unworthy names shall in due time be acknowledged by your Lord and Saviour, and you shall "inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

^r This is the idea suggested in the text. The enrolling of names has respect to citizens, whose rights are thereby ascertained and assured.

^s Heb. x. 38, 39.

^t Rev. iii. 5.

^u Exod. xxxii. 33. Ps. lxxix. 28. Jer. xvii. 13.

^x Rom. ii. 6, 7.

^y Job xvi. 19.

MDXIV.

THE GOSPEL REVEALED TO BABES.

Luke x. 21. *In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes : even so, Father ; for so it seemed good in thy sight.*

DEEP and mysterious are the ways of God, and “as far above our thoughts and ways, as the heavens are above the earth.” But the more they are contemplated, the more will they approve themselves to to us; even where they are most inscrutable, and where the heart of the natural man would be most ready to rise against them, a humble and pious mind will find abundant cause both for submission and joy. Of our blessed Lord we are often told, that he groaned in spirit: for indeed he was altogether “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief,” as his daily and hourly companion: but on one occasion it is said, that “he rejoiced in spirit;” and it was in an hour when he had been particularly contemplating the dispensations of his Father in relation to his Gospel. To the proud indeed this would be a subject of complaint and murmuring; but to the humble it was a proper ground of gratitude and thanksgiving. This is evident from the words before us; for the fuller understanding of which I will shew,

I. The conduct of God in relation to his Gospel—

Two things are here specified:

I. “He has hid it from the wise and prudent”—

[By “the wise and prudent” we are not to understand those that are *truly* wise and *truly* prudent, but those who are “wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight,” who are just objects of God’s heavy displeasure^a.

From these “God has hid” his Gospel. Not but that they have the same access to it as others, and might attain to the knowledge of it as well as others, if only they would seek it in a becoming spirit: for God does nothing either to withhold it from them, or to incapacitate them for the perception

^a Isai. v. 21. with Rom. xii. 16.

of it. God is said to do what he permits to be done^b: and it is not by any active exertion of his which man cannot withstand, but by such means only as leave men altogether responsible for their own blindness, that he hides his truth from the minds of any.

The Gospel is hid from this description of persons, partly, *through the very constitution of the Gospel itself*: for it reveals such a way of salvation as a proud conceited mind cannot receive: "it is foolishness to the natural man; neither can he receive it, because it is spiritually discerned^c." The doctrine of the cross is to the Jews a "stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness^d." It was foretold by the Prophet Isaiah, that the same person who should "be for a sanctuary to his believing people, should be for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, many amongst whom should stumble, and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken^e." And to the same effect was it said of Jesus, by the holy man who took him in his arms, that "he was set for the fall, as well as for the rising, of many in Israel, and for a sign that should be spoken against, that the thoughts of many hearts might be revealed^f."

It is yet further hid from them *through the agency of Satan*, to whom the blindness of unbelievers is especially ascribed, and who labours incessantly to prevent "the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, from shining unto them^g."

Doubtless it is also still further hid from them *through their being given up by God to judicial blindness*. "God's Spirit will not always strive with man^h." After having been long resisted, he will cease to "work upon their mindsⁱ:" they will then be given up to believe their own delusions^k, and to be taken in their own craftiness; and all "their wisdom and prudence will be brought to nought^l." In this way vast multitudes have been blinded in former ages^m, and are blinded at this very hour.]

2. But "it is revealed unto babes"—

[The term, "babes," includes not only those who are weak in respect of intellectual attainments, but those also, who, though of vigorous and cultivated minds, are sensible of their inability to discern spiritual truths without having first a spiritual discernment imparted to them.

^b Compare 2 Sam. xxiv. 1. with 1 Chron. xxi. 1.

^c 1 Cor. ii. 14.

^d 1 Cor. i. 23.

^e Isai. viii. 14, 15.

^f Luke ii. 34, 35.

^g 2 Cor. iv. 4.

^h Gen. vi. 3.

ⁱ 1 Thess. v. 19.

^k 2 Thess. ii. 11

^l 1 Cor. i. 19. and iii. 19.

^m Rom. ix. 7, 8.

To these the Gospel is revealed; and they have such a perception of it as brings peace into their souls, and holiness into their hearts and lives. Of course, we must not suppose that the mere circumstance of any person's being weak in understanding will procure for him this blessing: but if he seek this blessing in God's appointed way, the circumstance of his being of weak understanding shall not preclude him from the benefit. And in this respect persons of this description have an advantage, which is, that they are more easily convinced of their need of Divine teaching than persons of learning and refinement are; and are thereby more easily induced to seek of God the teaching of his good Spirit: and hence it is that many of *them* attain divine knowledge, whilst from the great mass of others it is hid.

That this preference is shewn to them is evident, both from the records of God's word and from daily observation. Whom did our blessed Saviour choose for his Apostles? Not the learned of the Scribes and Pharisees, but a few poor fishermen. To the proud he spoke in parables; which afterwards to his child-like Disciples he explained; saying to them, "Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to others in parables; that seeing, they might not see, and hearing, they might not understand:" and hence of the Rulers and of the Pharisees it is asked, "Have any of *them* believed in him?" In like manner the Apostles themselves found little success among the great and learned: "Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble were called: but God chose the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and the weak things to confound the mighty, yea, and things base and despised to bring to nought those which were high in worldly estimation, that no flesh might glory in his presence^a." And is it not so at this day? Who are the people that experience the enlightening, comforting, and transforming efficacy of the Gospel now? Are they the rich, and the great, and the learned? Would to God they were! But it is not so: it is to "babes, and not to the wise and prudent, that the Gospel is revealed" at this hour, as well as in former days: the Gospel has still the same stamp and character upon it as ever, in that "it is preached chiefly, if not exclusively, to the poor^b," and that "the common people hear it gladly^c."]

That the Divine conduct in this respect may not be an offence unto us, let us consider,

II. The dispositions with which it should be contemplated by us—

^a Luke viii. 10.

^b John vii. 48.

^c 1 Cor. i. 27—29.

^d Matt. xi. 5.

^e Mark xii. 37.

We should be duly sensible that this is indeed the conduct of God in relation to his Gospel: and we should evince,

1. Our submission to it, as an act of sovereignty—

[Certainly in this matter God acts as a sovereign, who has a right to dispense his blessings to whomsoever he will: “it is even so, Father, for so it seemeth good in thy sight.” God might have revealed his Gospel to all, or hid it from all, if it had pleased him; and none would have had any right to complain. As well might the fallen angels complain that man alone had a Redeemer provided for him, as any child of man complain, that he has derived less advantage from the Gospel than another. Had any other of Paul’s hearers reason to complain, because “the Lord opened Lydia’s heart to attend to the things that were spoken by him?” Assuredly not: God’s grace is his own; and he may dispense it as he pleases, according to his own sovereign will and pleasure^s. He himself asks, “Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?” and if *we* claim such a right, much more may *He*, who is, as Jesus calls him, “Lord of heaven and earth,” and who consequently may dispose both of heaven and earth according to his will, and “without giving to us an account of any of his matters^t.” When therefore we behold this, shall we presume to strive with God, or to say unto him, ‘What doest thou?’ Shall the clay arraign the conduct of the potter, or “the vessel say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus^u?” “He that reproveth God, let him answer it^x.”

Many, who see that God does indeed dispense his blessings according to his own good pleasure and the inscrutable counsel of his own will, endeavour to get rid of the notion of his sovereignty by asserting, that God has respect to some goodness in man which he has foreseen; and that he regulates his dispensations in accordance with some worthiness which he knows will at a future period appear in the objects of his choice, bestowing his favours on those who he knows will make a good use of them, and withholding them from those only who he foresees would abuse them. But, if this be so, how shall we understand those declarations of our Lord both in the preceding and following context? He turned him, we are told, to his Disciples, and said privately, “Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see: for I tell you that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them, and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them^y.” In this place the sovereign grace

^s Eph. i. 5. Phil. ii. 13. ^t Job xxxiii. 13. ^u Rom. ix. 20, 21.

^x Job xl. 2.

^y ver. 23, 24.

of God in the disposal of his gifts is clearly asserted. But you may say, ‘True; God gave to some what he withheld from others: but he gave to those who he knew would duly improve his gifts: and the persons from whom he withheld them, were involved in no responsibility on account of them. In order to prove the doctrine which has been insisted on, you must shew me, that God has bestowed the means of salvation on those who would *not* improve them, and withheld them from those who *would* have improved them: shew me *this*, and I grant that the point is established beyond a doubt. Look then at what our Lord asserts in the context respecting Tyre and Sidon, and Bethsaida and Chorazin. To these latter were means of conviction afforded, which were withheld from the former. Were these latter better than the former? Quite the reverse: had our Saviour’s miracles been wrought in Tyre and Sidon, *they* would long ago have repented, sitting in sackcloth and ashes; but when done in Capernaum, they had no other effect than thrusting her down the deeper into hell^z. Now all this must have been foreknown to God, else Jesus could not so positively have asserted it: yet here is evidence, that God withheld from some the very means which they would have duly improved, and imparted to others those very same means which he knew they would abuse to their own more aggravated condemnation. What shall we say then to these things? God himself tells us what to say: “Be still, and know that I am God^a,” who “have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and have compassion on whom I will have compassion^b.”]

2. Our gratitude for it as an act of mercy—

[Suppose that the Gospel were to be understood only as the deeper sciences are, by men of erudition and learning, in what a deplorable condition would the poor be! *They* have no time for laborious investigations, nor any of the endowments necessary for philosophical researches. *They* therefore could have no hope of ever attaining the knowledge of salvation. From absolute necessity *their* days must be consumed in making provision for the body: and unless they were so occupied, the whole world must be in a state of stagnation and want. But God has shewn no such partiality for the rich as to confine the knowledge of his Gospel to them. Earthly comforts indeed he has given in richer abundance to them; but spiritual blessings he has rather reserved for the poor: as St. James hath said; “Hath not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him^c.” Thus, where most there

^z ver. 13—15.

^b Rom. ix. 15, 18.

^a Ps. xlvi. 10.

^c Jam. ii. 5.

seems to have been an inequality in his dispensations, he has shewn an impartiality, making up to the one in spiritual blessings what he has withheld in temporal; and giving advantages in reference to eternity to those who have the less favourable lot in respect of the things of time and sense.

And is not this a ground, a just ground, of joy? Who, that sees what privations are often experienced by the poor, must not rejoice to be informed, that, taking both worlds into the account, there is a preponderance in their favour? Our blessed Lord rejoiced in this; yea, and leaped for joy^d: and we also, if our minds be constituted like his, shall from our inmost souls contemplate it with gratitude and thanksgiving.]

Let us LEARN then,

1. Rightly to appreciate divine knowledge—

[We would on no account utter a word that should detract from the excellence of human knowledge. We readily allow that learning does elevate and expand the mind, so as to raise its possessor far above his fellows in many respects: but when compared with spiritual knowledge, it is a poor, and low, and grovelling attainment. St. Paul was excelled by none of his contemporaries in mental attainments: yet, valuable as he once esteemed them, he, when truly converted to God, said, “What things were gain to me, those I count but loss for Christ; yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord^e.” And such must be your estimate also of this knowledge; for it is this only that will render us truly happy, either in this world or in that which is to come — — —]

2. To seek it in God’s appointed way—

[Human sciences are to be attained by study; but the knowledge of the Gospel must be gained by prayer. In the words immediately following my text, our Lord says, “No man knoweth who the Son is, but the Father; or who the Father is, but the Son, and *he to whom the Son shall reveal him.*” Know ye then that, though the study of the Holy Scriptures is necessary, it is not sufficient: for in the same place where you are told to “seek for wisdom as for hid treasures,” you are told to “lift up your voice, and to cry unto God for it; for that it is God alone who gives it^f.” Meditation and prayer must go hand in hand: and if you will seek for knowledge in this way, though you be but a babe, you shall attain it; and, though you be a mere “fool in all other respects, you shall not err therein^g” — — —]

^d ἡγαλλίασατο.

^f Prov. ii. i. 6.

^e Phil. iii. 7, 8.

^g Isai. xxxv. 8

MDXV.

THE BLESSINGS OF A PREACHED GOSPEL.

Luke x. 23, 24. *And he turned him unto his disciples, and said privately, Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see: for I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.*

OF all things relating to the world around us, the most delightful is the progress of the Gospel, and the consequent augmentation of the Redeemer's empire. This event had commenced through the ministrations of the seventy disciples, whom our Lord had sent as his harbingers throughout the land of Judæa: and it had filled our blessed Saviour himself with joy, in the midst of all the sorrows with which he was daily encompassed^a. His own more immediate disciples he particularly congratulated on the insight which they had into the mysteries of his religion; in which respect they were favoured far beyond all the servants of God who had preceded them, not excepting the most distinguished of their kings, or the most enlightened of their prophets^b. To impress this the more deeply on their minds, "he turned to them apart, and *privately* whispered it, as it were, in their ears."

To you, publicly, I will offer the same congratulations, whilst I set before you the blessings of a preached Gospel,

I. As enjoyed by the immediate Disciples of our Lord—

The patriarchs and prophets were highly privileged in the light they enjoyed—

[They were instructed in the knowledge of the one true God, of whom all the rest of the world were ignorant. They

^a ver. 17, 21.

^b The Exordium might be varied to suit any particular occasion. Suppose it were the subject of an *Ordination* or *Visitation Sermon*, or on occasion of a *Bible* or *Mission Society*, Christ's appointment of the Seventy might be noticed. If it were on the *Fifth of November*, it might be stated that, amongst the chief blessings for which we were then called to thank God, was the preservation of the Protestant Religion.

had a view also of all his glorious perfections, of which the wisest philosophers could form no just conception. They knew, moreover, in what way a sinner might find acceptance with God; whilst all the rest of mankind were left in awful suspense respecting their future state; not knowing, certainly, whether they should live in another world, or whether, if they did, they should partake of a happy or a miserable existence. Of Abraham it is said, that "the Gospel was preached to him in that blessed promise, that in him, and in his seed, should all the nations of the earth be blessed." "He greatly desired to see the day of Christ; and he did see it, and was glad." Succeeding prophets discerned it yet more clearly; for, with progressive accuracy and minuteness, they were inspired to describe his person, work, and offices; though, alas! they did not comprehend their own predictions, whilst they declared "the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow." Yet, compared with all the rest of the world, they were in Goshen, whilst all others were surrounded with "a darkness which might be felt."]

But the Disciples were far more highly favoured than they—

[They were permitted to see the Son of God himself; and *that*, not darkly, in types and prophecies, but clearly, and face to face. They were privileged to behold all his mighty works; and to hear from day to day the instructive discourses of Him who "spake as never man spake." They enjoyed the yet further privilege of having his public discourses explained to them in private; and of being taught, by a fuller and more explicit interpretation, what to others had been communicated only in parables. At the same time, they had the peculiar felicity to see a perfect exhibition of the whole will of God in the life and conversation of their Lord; and *that*, not in circumstances which were inapplicable to themselves, but in circumstances in which they themselves were soon to move. Now, compare their advantages with any that were enjoyed by the patriarchs or prophets of former ages, and they must be acknowledged to have enjoyed privileges which kings and prophets might well desire, and which, in fact, they had desired, but in vain.]

But the congratulations will be found still more due to us, if we consider the Gospel,

II. As enjoyed by ourselves at this day—

Great as were the advantages of those who attended upon our Lord, they were not without considerable alloy—

[The very appearance of our Lord amongst them was such as to lay a stumbling-block in the way of his immediate attendants. How could they conceive him to be the Saviour of the world, whom they saw exposed to hunger and thirst, and destitute of "a place where to lay his head?" Or, if from his miracles they entertained a hope, what must they think when they beheld him seized, condemned, crucified, entombed? Though he had often told them that he should be put to an ignominious death, and shed his blood as an expiation for sin, they never could comprehend his meaning: nay, they would not endure the thought of his being so treated. They were, like all the rest of their nation, deluded with the expectation of a temporal Messiah, who should deliver them from the Roman yoke; and, even after his resurrection, they could not divest themselves of this erroneous hope. On the day of Pentecost, indeed, their views were rectified in a considerable degree: but not even the Apostles themselves, for a very long period, were able to understand the design of God in his Gospel to save the Gentile world, nor the extent of the commission which they themselves had received to "preach the Gospel to every creature." When Peter was prevailed upon, by a series of special visions and express directions, to go and shew the way of salvation to Cornelius, the whole college of Apostles called him to an account for it, as though he had transgressed a positive command of God. And for many, many years did an opinion prevail very extensively through the Church, that the law of Moses was still obligatory on those who embraced the Gospel; so contracted were their views of Christ, as having fulfilled the Law; and so imperfect their knowledge of his salvation, as excluding every ground of hope, except that which was founded on his atoning sacrifice.]

But to *us* is the Gospel preached under every advantage—

[Neither Jewish prejudice, nor Gentile philosophy, have any longer a footing amongst us, to distract and darken our views; at least, such delusions are found only amongst those who love to indulge them, and who wish for an excuse to reject the pure Gospel. We see the whole plan of salvation in one entire view, as concerted between the Father and the Son, as carried into effect by the incarnation and death of the Lord Jesus, and as applied to the souls of men by the Holy Spirit. We see all the types fulfilled in Christ, and all the prophecies accomplished. We behold the perfect model as delivered to Moses, and can compare it with the structure itself which is now completed. We behold the Person of Christ, as God and man; his *work*, as obeying the Law, and enduring its penalties for us; his *offices* of King, Priest, and Prophet; and the office

also of the Holy Spirit, in *applying* to us the salvation which the Lord Jesus has *wrought out* for us. We have the further advantage of seeing many prophecies fulfilled, in the destruction of the Jewish state and polity; the dispersion of that nation over the face of the globe, whilst yet they continue a distinct people in every place; and the establishment of the Redeemer's kingdom throughout the Gentile world. I say, then, that the congratulations given to the Disciples are due in a very superior degree to us; since, whilst we are partakers of their privileges in all that they saw and heard, we are freed from many disadvantages under which they laboured, and enjoy many advantages which they were not privileged to possess.]

Now let me COMMEND this subject to the more particular attention of those who, like our Lord's Disciples, are capable of estimating their high privilege—

1. What a debt of gratitude do you owe to Almighty God, for the mercies you enjoy!

[You would think, perhaps, that kings and prophets are objects worthy to be envied. But I declare to you, that not kings, with all their grandeur, nor prophets, with all their inspiration, are blessed in comparison of you. I will even go further still, and say, that not even the immediate attendants on our Lord are to be compared with you, in respect of the privileges you enjoy. A view of the Gospel salvation, and of the glory of God as revealed in it, is the highest privilege of man on earth, a privilege which even the angels in heaven covet to enjoy. Alas! how little is a preached Gospel valued amongst you as it ought to be, and how unconscious are most of you of the distinguished mercies you possess! Do, my dear brethren, learn to estimate your blessings aright; and let the daily language of your hearts and lips be, “thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift!”]

2. What care should you take to improve these mercies!

[You must not be satisfied with hearing the Gospel: no: you must embrace it with your whole hearts: it should be your life, your joy, your all. Do but consider how glorious it is in itself, and what blessings it brings into the soul: consider the pardon of unnumbered sins, the mortification of deep-rooted lusts, the peace it gives you with your offended God, and the very earnest of heaven which it pours into your soul: I say, consider these things, and lay hold on them, and glory in them, and let them be “all your salvation and all your desire.”]

3. How earnest should you be in diffusing these blessings through the world!

[It is not for yourselves alone that you are thus instructed, but for the world around you. And see how many millions of the human race are ignorant of that Saviour whom you worship, and of that salvation which you enjoy! The unhappy Jews have yet the veil upon their hearts, which you should endeavour to remove; and the Gentiles are yet bowing down to senseless idols, that can never profit nor deliver them. Labour, then, both for Jews and Gentiles, to bring them to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus. Unite with the societies that are established for that end: and let no petty jealousies keep you from co-operating with those who are engaged in the blessed work of diffusing the Scriptures all the world over, and sending missionaries to every quarter of the globe. The sphere is large enough to occupy the utmost exertions of all. "The field is the world:" and how few are the labourers to cultivate the ground! Let a sense of gratitude to God stir you all up to impart to others the blessings which you yourselves have received. "Freely you have received; and freely you should give:" and know, for your comfort, that, instead of diminishing your own blessings by imparting them to others, the more richly you distribute them, the more abundantly will they flow into your own souls.]

MDXVI.

THE GOOD SAMARITAN.

Luke x. 30—35. *A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow, when he departed, he took out twopence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him: and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again I will repay thee.*

MUCH address is necessary in dealing with persons of a captious spirit: we should speak to them with

faithfulness, yet avoid giving them any unnecessary offence. Our Lord was continually beset with persons of this description, but in nothing was his Divine wisdom more conspicuous than in the answers he gave them. The parable before us admirably illustrates this observation—

I. Explain the parable—

We cannot enter into the full meaning of the parable without attending particularly to *the occasion of it*—

[A teacher of the law had interrogated our Lord respecting the way to life, and was desired by our Lord to state what the law required^a. The lawyer gave a just summary of its requirements, not doubting but that he had fulfilled them all. Our Lord suggested in reply, that though obedience to the law would entitle him to life, he was little aware of the extent to which that obedience must be carried. The lawyer (whether from fear of conviction, or confidence of having fulfilled it, we cannot say) passed over the first commandment, and asked for an explanation of the second. To convey the desired information, and to correct his self-justifying spirit, our Lord spake this parable.]

The circumstances of the parable deserve also to be noticed—

[A Jew is represented as having been robbed and wounded between Jericho, and Jerusalem^b. A priest, and a Levite (thousands of whom dwelt at Jericho) are supposed to have seen him in their way to Jerusalem; but, though from their very office they were called to exercise compassion, they passed by him without administering any comfort or relief^c. A Samaritan is then introduced as performing the kindest offices towards him^d, and as engaging for the whole expense of his maintenance and cure^e. Thus our Lord shewed, that

^a ver. 25—29.

^b This was probable enough, as a desert much infested with robbers lay between them.

^c The latter from curiosity “came and looked on him;” but turned away as the priest had done before him.

^d There was a most inveterate hatred between the Jews and Samaritans (compare John iv. 9. and viii. 48.), but the minute relation of the circumstances was well calculated to disarm the lawyer’s prejudice.

^e Two-pence was equal to about fifteen-pence of our money, and might be the amount of the expense already incurred; or perhaps

any person, of whatever nation, or whatever religion, must be esteemed our neighbour. By his artful statement also, he drew from the lawyer himself an express, though reluctant, acknowledgment of this truth^f.]

But the peculiar suitableness of the parable to the occasion is that which most needs explanation—

[The lawyer was manifestly of a proud self-righteous spirit^g. Though he knew the letter of the law, he was ignorant of its spiritual import. He supposed that he had merited eternal life by his obedience; yet he was far from shewing a loving disposition even towards our Lord himself. The parable opened to him more extensive views of the law: it shewed him that, so far from having practised his duty, he had not even understood it. Thus it destroyed at once all his self-righteous hopes, and, at the same time, inculcated the necessity of practical, and universal benevolence. Mild as the rebuke was, it could not but convince his judgment; yet was it so conveyed that it could not reasonably give offence.]

The parable thus explained, we may now proceed to,
II. Improve it—

And

1. In a less appropriate way—

[This good Samaritan was not intended to represent our Lord; and to put such a construction upon the parable, is utterly to pervert it. Yet, when contemplating the love of a fellow-creature, we may, without any impropriety, bring to your remembrance the infinitely richer love of our most adorable Redeemer. We justly admire the conduct of the benevolent Samaritan; and the consideration, that his kindness was shewn to a detested Jew, greatly enhances its value. How then must we admire the love of Christ towards our ruined race! We were robbed of the image of God in which we were made: we were left altogether “dead in trespasses and sins: no created beings could administer any effectual relief; but Jesus beheld us lying in our blood^h; yet, though we were his enemies, he pitied usⁱ. He not only took care of us, but “laid down his life for us:” he has taken upon himself also the whole charge of our cure: there is nothing that we want, which he has not freely bestowed upon us. Let us then magnify and adore our

might be as much as the Samaritan could spare at that time. His liberality was sufficiently manifest by his engagement to defray the whole sum that might become due.

^f The lawyer, though compelled to give honour to the Samaritan, studiously avoided mentioning his name.

^g ver. 25.

^h Ezek. xvi. 6.

ⁱ Rom. v. 6, 8.

generous Benefactor. While we respect the exercise of love in a fellow-creature, let us study to comprehend the unsearchable love of Christ^k; and let us make his love to us the model of our love to others^l.]

2. In the way expressly intended by our blessed Lord—

[We have observed that the parable was intended to correct the lawyer's self-righteousness, and to unfold to him the true nature and extent of Christian charity. Let us therefore learn from it these invaluable lessons. Let us learn *the folly of self-righteousness*. The law requires us to "love God with all our hearts, and our neighbour as ourselves;" and if we obeyed it perfectly without the smallest defect throughout our whole lives, we might be justified by it. But who ever loved and served God to the utmost extent of all his faculties and powers? Who ever incessantly occupied himself in labours of love towards those who hated and despised him? Who has not felt some backwardness to communion with God, and some want of sympathy with his neighbour? Yet the law can be satisfied with nothing less than perfect obedience: it denounces a curse against us if we transgress it in one single instance^m. Hence we are told that no flesh living can be justified by itⁿ. Let us then cease to expect life by our own obedience. Let us for ever shut our mouths and stand guilty before God^o. Let us acknowledge ourselves to need mercy as much as the Apostles^p, and adopt the language of St. Paul^q— Let us learn also *the true nature of Christian charity*. We are apt to imagine that persons of our own nation, sect, or party, are the proper objects of our love; but christian charity extends itself to all mankind. The distinctions of religion or politics should be forgotten, whenever an object stands in need of our assistance; and we should sympathize as truly with our bitterest enemy, as with our dearest friend. Thus did St. Paul compassionate the unbelieving Jews^r; and our Lord weep over their murderous and devoted city^s. Let us then endeavour to mortify our narrow, selfish principles, and to abound in disinterested, self-denying offices of love^t.]

^k Eph. iii. 18, 19.

^l John xv. 12.

^m Gal. iii. 10.

ⁿ Rom. iii. 20.

^o Rom. iii. 19.

^p Gal. ii. 16.

^q Phil. iii. 8, 9.

^r Rom. ix. 2, 3.

^s Luke xix. 41.

^t If this were the subject of a *Charity Sermon*, it would be proper, in this place, to advert to the particular circumstances of the charity.

MDXVII.

MARTHA AND MARY'S CHARACTERS COMPARED.

Luke x. 41, 42. *Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things : but one thing is needful : and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.*

IT is a generally prevailing notion, that religion should be confined to the Church and the closet, and not be brought forward as a topic of conversation in company. But our Lord's conduct completely refutes this absurd idea; and shews, that we ought to improve our intercourse with men, by causing our light to shine before them, and by endeavouring to instil the knowledge of religion into their minds. If it be objected, "that his office was peculiar, and that therefore we ought not to imitate him in this respect," behold, the history before us introduces us to him in the house of a friend, where he had occasion to determine this very point in reference to the women whom he was visiting: one of them was applauded by him for embracing the opportunity afforded her to obtain religious instruction; and the other was reproved for the neglect of it; and that too at a time when such neglect would have been as excusable as it could be under any circumstances whatever.

To elucidate this subject, we shall,

I. Compare the characters of Martha and Mary—

We may first notice *wherein they were agreed*—

[We are assured that both of them were Disciples of our Lord. We could not, indeed, ascertain this from the circumstance of his visit to them; (for he sometimes associated with proud Pharisees, and notorious sinners;) but we know it from the strong and mutual affection that subsisted between them. We presume, therefore, that both of them believed in him as the Messiah: both of them looked to him as the fountain and foundation of all their hopes: both of them confessed his name, and were willing to bear his cross: and lastly, both of them desired to make his will the rule of their conduct.]

We may next consider *wherein they differed*—

[There are very different degrees of piety, where the same

opportunities and advantages are enjoyed: and the very same persons are in different frames at different seasons. The very best of men, if considered in the light in which some particular action would place him, would appear very unlike a true Christian. Though, therefore, we must not apologize for sin, we must make allowance for the operation of peculiar circumstances, when we are weighing the general characters of men.

Martha then, we observe, was *unseasonably* anxious about the affairs of this life, while her sister Mary treated them with becoming indifference. The great Teacher and Saviour of mankind had condescended to take up his abode with them: it might be expected, therefore, that they would lose as little as possible of his company, and devolve on others their domestic employments, rather than deprive themselves of his valuable instructions. And thus it was with Mary. She was so absorbed in her attention to his discourses, that she neglected secular matters as of inferior concern. But Martha, on the contrary, was so intent on providing for her guest, that she was quite forgetful of her spiritual interests. We do not mean to justify a neglect of domestic duties; but we contend that there may be occasions so urgent as to demand our immediate attention, even though some points of less importance should be neglected. No one could doubt but that a disregard of dress would be very excusable, in case our life were in danger from fire: and, in the same manner, Mary's disregard of worldly formalities might well be excused, when she was called from them by duties of paramount obligation.

Martha, moreover, was *unduly* anxious about the affairs of this life. Granting that she meant nothing but to honour her Lord, and that her way of honouring him was proper, still, why did she suffer her temper to be ruffled? Why did she reflect upon her sister, for not uniting with her in such unprofitable employments? Why did she endeavour to interest Jesus himself in her quarrels; and even find fault with him for not interposing his authority to make Mary as worldly as herself? All this betrayed a little mind, occupied with vanities, studious of show, and too susceptible of irritation from things which ought never to have gained such an ascendant over her. Mary, on the contrary, indifferent to earthly pomp, evinced the superior heavenliness of her mind, and thereby preserved the tranquillity of it undisturbed.]

We shall more accurately determine their respective characters, if we,

II. Consider the judgment of our Lord respecting them—

In this answer to Martha,

1. He lays down a general position respecting the care of the soul—

[The care of the soul, by whatever terms we describe it, is justly called “the one thing needful.” Were we indeed to judge by the conduct of the world at large, we should rather call it, ‘the one thing needless;’ since every pursuit, however trifling, is preferred before it. But there is nothing of such value as the soul; the whole world, in comparison of it, is a mere vanity. Nor is there any difference in this respect between the rich and the poor: the souls of all are of equal value in the sight of God; all are equally concerned to secure eternal happiness. There is no situation where an attention to our spiritual interests can be dispensed with; no situation wherein the concerns of eternity should not be uppermost in our minds. Other things may be desirable; but the care of the soul is *needful*, absolutely, universally, and indispensably needful.]

2. He applies that position to the present occasion—

[He first applies it *in a way of reproof*. Though he loved Martha, he would not forbear to reprove in her what he saw amiss. He tells her, that she was acting in direct opposition to this obvious and established truth; and that her distraction of mind, arising from “*many things*,” argued an unmindfulness about “*one thing*,” which was of more importance than all other things together. But, though he reproved her, he was far from shewing even that severity which her petulance deserved. He spoke with a tenderness well calculated to conciliate her esteem, and with an earnestness fitted to impress her mind with the importance of the subject^a.

Happy would it be for us, if when we are too deeply involved in worldly cares, we would call to mind this salutary reproof, and consider it as addressed immediately to ourselves.

Next our Lord applies this position *in a way of approbation*. The part which Mary had chosen is called by him, “that good part.” Now what was it that Mary had done? She had been sitting at the feet of Jesus, and listening with delight to his instructive conversation. She had, in short, been more occupied about the welfare of her soul than about a vain parade of courtesy and compliment. This might well be called a “*good part* :” it was good in the estimation of Jesus, and must be so in the opinion of all who judge according to truth. People indeed, when in the midst of gaiety and dissipation, ridicule it as absurd: but did ever any man that had chosen this good part find reason to condemn it? Can we conceive of any pious man on his death-bed, cautioning his surviving

^a Observe the repetition, Martha, Martha: see others of a similar nature, Luke xiii. 34. and xxii. 31.

relatives against loving their Lord too much, and feeling too deeply the interests of their souls? It was no little commendation of the part which Mary chose, that "it should never be taken away from her:" our Lord would not deprive her of it; nor would he suffer any other, whether men or devils, to take it away. As for Martha's case, the effect of that would be as transient as the feast itself: but the fruits of Mary's attention should last for ever.

Let us only bear in mind this vindication of Mary's cause, and we can never doubt whose character we should prefer, or whose conduct we should imitate.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are wholly occupied with the pursuits of this life—

[What, think you, would our Lord have said to Martha, if her state had been like yours? Would he have approved of it, and have told her that her attention to her social and relative duties was sufficient, though she took no care at all about her soul? — — —]

2. Those who, though professing to be devoted to Christ, are of a worldly spirit—

[What a poor appearance did Martha make on this occasion! and what little encouragement you have to follow her example! Remember, that "you should be crucified to the world, and the world should be crucified to you"^b — — —]

3. Those who are seeking with all earnestness the salvation of their souls—

[You must expect, that lukewarm and worldly professors will condemn you as much as the ungodly themselves do: and the more nearly they are related to you, the more asperity, perhaps, they may shew towards you. But commit your cause to Jesus; and he will vindicate you in due season. Positive duties, indeed, you must on no account neglect. But, while the world has your hands, let Jesus have your hearts — — —]

^b Gal. vi. 14.

MDXVIII.

ONE THING NEEDFUL.

Luke x. 42. *One thing is needful.*

HERE we are introduced, as it were, into the bosom of a holy family; and hear, in part at least, the instructions given to them: "One thing is needful." Let us now suppose that we ourselves are that

family; and that, in the place of our blessed Lord, I am called to instruct you. My subject shall be, that "One thing is needful:" and whilst I deliver that truth, so necessary to be received by you, I would deliver it as myself feeling its importance, and declare it with all the fidelity that such a subject demands.

Let me then,

I. Shew what this one thing needful is—

In general terms, it may be called, The care of the soul. But, that we may have the precise view of it which was conveyed at that time, I will speak of it,

1. Simply—

[Mary was sitting at the feet of Jesus, listening to his instructions. This was the thing complained of by Martha, and the thing applauded by our blessed Lord. Now, this is the one thing needful for you also. True, you cannot have the same access to him that Mary had: but he speaks to you in the written word, and through the ministration of his servants. What, then, should you do in relation to the written word? You should sit at the feet of Jesus there, from day to day, and ponder every truth that is there recorded. If you read, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me;" you should instantly determine, through grace, to come to God by Christ, and to make him all your life and your salvation. Do you read that you are "not to live henceforth unto yourselves, but unto Him who died for you and rose again;" you should determine, through grace, to devote yourselves altogether to the service of your Lord, and to live for him alone. In like manner, when you attend upon the ministry of the word, you should "hear it, not as the word of man, but, as it is in truth, the word of God." You should come *in the very spirit of Mary*, and sit as *in the very spirit of Mary*, and hear as *in the spirit of Mary*; not from curiosity, not in a cavilling spirit, not to perform a customary duty, but to *get instruction for your souls*. Your whole soul should be swallowed up, as it were, in the subject proposed for your consideration; and every word that is spoken should be treasured up in your heart for the regulation of your faith and practice. This attention to the interests of your soul should be *the one employment of your minds from day to day*.]

2. In a way of contrast—

[The one thing needful is not contrasted with vice of any kind. The man who indulges in any evil course is far enough from the one thing needful: he goes in the high road to perdition, without so much as dreaming of the one thing needful.

No: the thing of which Martha complained was, that when there were household concerns which called for her sister's attention, she was attending to the concerns of her soul. This was what she blamed; and what our Lord commended. Let me not however be misunderstood, as saying that any person is at liberty to neglect his worldly business; for an attention to that, *in its place*, is necessary for every living man: but it must not be suffered to interfere with the more important interests of the soul. On the contrary, where the two duties come in competition with each other, *that* must invariably be deferred. We blame not Martha for performing the rights of hospitality towards the Lord Jesus and his friends: but her care about this was excessive, and unseasonable too; inasmuch as, through her anxiety about this minor concern, she lost an opportunity for the benefit of her soul: and our Lord informs her that *this* was wrong. *This*, then, is the comparative view of the subject. The one thing needful is, to feel the paramount importance of eternal things, and to have the things of time and sense entirely subordinated to the concerns of the soul.]

Having explained the one thing needful, I will now,
II. Commend it to your choice—

Mary had chosen it, as I wish you also to do.
And that I may induce you to choose it, I will set before you,

1. The importance of it—

[This is "needful," more needful than any other thing under heaven. It is altogether needful both to your *safety* and *happiness*. Suppose you are ever so little engaged in worldly business, you may go to heaven: whatever relates to the world may be done for you: but no one can act for you in relation to the soul: if all the people in the universe were to unite their efforts, they could not supply your lack of services in the concerns of your soul. They *must* be attended to by yourself: and without the strictest possible attention to them, you never can secure heaven, never can be approved of your God. Nor can you be happy without this. You may be happy in the want of earthly things, even if you were as destitute as Lazarus himself: but can you be happy without the favour of God? without an interest in the Saviour? without a renewed heart? without a title to heaven? No, you cannot: you cannot know what peace is: you cannot look forward with comfort to a dying hour: you cannot contemplate, with any kind of satisfaction, the terrors of a future judgment, or the realities of an eternal state. Then, if without an attention to the one thing needful you can be neither safe nor happy, is it wise to neglect the concerns of your soul? It is well said, What shall it profit a

man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall he give in exchange for his soul? Methinks I have already said enough to engage you on the side of Mary, and to impress on you the necessity of following her example. Remember, *this* is “*the one thing needful*;” and, *in this view*, the only thing that is needful.]

2. The excellency of it—

[Two things our Lord speaks in commendation of it: first, it is *good*; “*Mary has chosen the good part*:” and next, it is *permanent*; “*It shall never be taken away from her*.”

Consider now these two points. First, it is *good*. Worldly labours, I grant, are good in their place, *as means to some end*: but there is nothing *intrinsically* good in any worldly office whatever. But spiritual exercises are good, irrespective of any end whatever. The love of God is good: the love of Christ is good: the love of holiness in all its branches, is good. The world may cry out against these things as they will, and load them with every opprobrious name: but they are good. They are reputed good by God, who expressly calls them so; and by angels, who know it by sweet experience; and by all the saints that ever lived, and who chose them on this very account. Yes, in the estimation of the ungodly too, even by the very men who hate and despise them, they are good: for it is in consequence of this conviction, that in their hearts they venerate a holy man, and wish to “*die the death of the righteous*,” though they cannot be prevailed upon to live his life. What does every man feel on his dying bed? He may not feel any great *desire to serve God*; but he feels a secret *wish that he had served him*: and that clearly shews what his judgment of this subject is. As for those who are gone into the eternal world, ask one of them what he now thinks of the one thing needful? There would be no difference of opinion between one that should come from heaven, and one who should come from hell: they would be equally decisive in their judgment, though, alas! with widely different feelings: and the very instant any one of you shall open his eyes in the eternal world, I will venture to say, he, if suffered to come back and deliver his sentiments, would speak more strongly and more decidedly upon it, than I ever have done, or ever can do. Will any of you, then, be so mad as to go on seeking the poor contemptible vanities of this world, in preference to what, by all in heaven, earth, and hell, is acknowledged as supremely *good*?

But consider, also, its *permanency*: “*If you choose this good part, it shall never be taken away from you*.” Can this be said of earthly things? Possess crowns and kingdoms, if you will: experience proves, that, by popular commotion or

the events of war, you may soon be hurled from your eminence, into a state of bondage and misery. But of common possessions how soon may you be bereaved, by fraud, or violence, or inundation, or fire! And how soon must you, at all events, be deprived of them by death! But if you have sought for eternal happiness, who shall deprive you of *that*? God *will* not; and no other *can*. What can *men* do? All that they can do, is, to kill the body: they cannot touch the soul. And *devils*, what can *they* do? They can tempt, but they cannot force you to any single act. They could not even enter into the swine, without leave: how, then, shall they destroy a child of God? Your final enjoyment of the blessings you seek is secured to you by covenant and by oath: and whilst others, at death, lose all *their* possessions, you at death come into the fullest possible enjoyment of *yours*, an enjoyment that shall endure through all eternity.

Need I then say more? Surely, there can be but one common sentiment amongst you all. Would to God that there might be one determination also, a determination to devote yourselves unreservedly to God, and to mind from henceforth the one thing needful!

Think not, however, that this can be done without great and abiding efforts. For the ungodly world will surely cry out against you, as acting a most absurd part, and as carried away by a heated imagination. Yes, and even good people of a worldly cast, notwithstanding they be amongst your nearest and dearest relatives, will, like Martha, complain of you as carrying matters too far. And no doubt your minister also will come in for his share of the blame: for even Christ himself was blamed, and *that* by a pious person also, for encouraging Mary in an extravagant attention to her spiritual interests, to the neglect of her worldly business: "Lord, carest thou not that my sister has left me to serve alone? Bid her, therefore, that she help me:" for I cannot but consider you as encouraging her to carry matters to excess. As for me, brethren, I am willing to bear my share of the blame: it is no pain to me to bear what my Lord and Saviour bore before me. But be not ye discouraged. You see in Mary what you have to expect. You see, however, on the other hand, what approbation she met with from the Lord himself. And *that* sufficed for *her*. Let it also suffice for *you*. Only approve yourself to *him*, and you need not mind any thing that *man* can either say or do. It is decidedly "the *good* part" which I recommend to you; and therefore "*choose* it," and *follow* it, and *adhere* to it, under all circumstances. Never will you repent of this line of conduct. Sit now, with unwearied perseverance, at the feet of Jesus; and you shall, ere long, receive his applauding testimony, and be seated with him on his throne of glory to all eternity.]

MDXIX.

FORMS OF PRAYER, GOOD.

Luke xi. 1. *And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his Disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his Disciples.*

SCARCELY any thing can more strongly mark our defection from God, than our inability to pray. It might well be supposed, that, considering how many sins we have to be forgiven, how many wants to be supplied, and how many blessings to be acknowledged, that we should never be at a loss for matter in our addresses at the throne of grace, or for a suitable frame in drawing nigh to God. But the truth is, that there is no duty more difficult than that of prayer: for as, on the one hand, “we know not what to pray for as we ought;” so neither, on the other hand, are we able to plead with God as we ought, unless “the Holy Spirit help our infirmities, and assist us in relation to every part of this duty^a.” The Apostles themselves felt their need of instruction upon this head, and received from their Divine Master a form of prayer fitted for the use of the Church in all ages. From this circumstance, I shall take occasion to shew,

I. The importance of sound formularies of instruction and prayer, for the use of the Church of Christ—

Every society has some ground of mutual agreement, and some principle on which the members are formed into one collective body. Now the Church of Christ is a society collected out of the world, and united in one common sentiment of adherence to Christ, as their only Lord and Saviour. There have been minor differences between the different parts of this body; and different societies have been formed, to confirm in their respective views the members attached to each. But on the subject of these differences I have at present no call to speak: my purpose,

^a Rom. viii. 26.

in this part of my discourse, being simply to shew, that, by the common consent of all, certain formularies have been judged expedient, for the marking and perpetuating of their respective sentiments. Some, indeed, have limited their formularies to a statement of principles; others have extended them to forms of prayer: and it is of these latter that I intend more especially to speak. I mean not to condemn those who differ in this respect; but only to vindicate those who, in addition to a statement of their principles, have also adopted a form of prayer.

A statement of principles is good—

[It forms a bond of union between the members of the same Church. Doubtless, if the principles themselves be false, the record that contains them cannot be good: but, supposing the principles to be sound, the forming of them into an accredited and unchanging standard cannot but be a signal benefit to the Church that is governed by them. Such a statement is a great preservative from error; it strengthens the hands of the faithful members, and is a witness against those who are unfaithful; and it serves, in perpetuity, as a rallying point, both for those who adhere to truth and those who have departed from it.]

A form of prayer is good also—

[That there are persons capable of conducting public worship in a truly edifying manner without a form, is readily acknowledged. But the great mass of those who lead the devotions of the people (I mean not to offend any, but only to “speak the truth in love,”) are far from equal to the task: and even those whose *gifts* are sufficient, find themselves too often destitute of the *grace* of prayer. They can utter words, perhaps, with fluency: but their words betray the absence of the heart: and the barrenness felt by those who speak, is diffused over all who hear. I grant that there may also be a hardness and barrenness in one who uses a pre-conceived form: but still, if that form express all that a devout spirit could wish, the persons who join in it may themselves, through the influence of the Holy Spirit, supply the unction, which the minister has failed to manifest.

In family devotions, a pre-conceived form is not only useful, but necessary, for the generality of Christians. In ministers, a kind of *official* fluency is obtained by habit: but in others, even in men of learning and of great intelligence, who can deliver themselves with ease in a popular harangue, there is a

straitness, both of conception and expression, when they come before God in prayer; and if they had not somewhat of a form prepared for them, they must abandon the use of family prayer altogether.

As to the lawfulness of such forms, I conceive *that* to be placed beyond a doubt, by the answer which our Lord gave to the request made to him in our text. His Disciples desired him to teach them to pray, as John had taught his Disciples: and our Lord gave them a prayer, which they were directed to use, either in form or substance, whenever they drew nigh to God at the throne of grace: a clear proof that forms are good; and that in the use of them we may “worship God in spirit and in truth.”]

Assuming that sound formularies are good, I proceed to point out,

II. The peculiar excellence of those which are used and sanctioned by the Church of England—

The Articles, the Homilies, and the Liturgy, are the standard of Divine truth, as embraced and professed by our Established Church. Now,

The *Articles* are peculiarly excellent, both as to the soundness of their principles, and the moderation of their statement—

[They have evidently been drawn up with a view to comprehend all persons whose views, upon the whole, are right. The Calvinist and the Arminian meet upon the ground there stated, each being satisfied that his own sentiments are contained in them. And this, considering how unqualified the Scriptural expressions, on which their respective creeds are founded, often are, is very desirable. They are articles of peace, and not of war: and they serve to combine in one Church all that is truly good, whilst they repudiate those only who deny some fundamental truth of Christianity.]

The *Homilies* are a pattern of simplicity and godly sincerity—

[Never was truth more plainly stated than in them. The language in which they are written is indeed antiquated; in consequence of which, the use of them has been discontinued: but, in their mode of stating divine truth, and enforcing it upon the conscience, they never have been excelled by any composition whatever. It were well if they were more regarded as a pattern for popular addresses at this day: for, in comparison of them, the great mass of public addresses, if viewed with candour and with Apostolic zeal, would be found,

it is to be feared, exceedingly defective, both in energy and in scriptural instruction.]

As for the *Liturgy*, no commendation can be too great for it—

[Being of human composition, it must, of necessity, partake of human infirmity. But, taken all together, it comes nearer to inspiration than any book that ever was composed. Only let a person be humbled as a sinner before God, and he will not find in the whole universe any prayers so suited to his taste. They express exactly what a broken-hearted penitent before God would desire to express: yet is there in them nothing of extravagance or of cant: all is sober, chaste, judicious; so minute, as to comprehend every thing which the largest assembly of suppliants could wish to utter; and at the same time so general, as not to involve any one to a greater extent than his own experience sanctions and approves. Throughout the whole, the suppliant is made to stand on the only true foundation, and to urge every request in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, his atoning Saviour, his all-prevailing Advocate. Throughout the whole, also, is the Holy Spirit's influence acknowledged as the only source of light and life, and implored as the gift of God to sinners for Christ's sake. In point of devotion, whether prayer or praise be offered, nothing can exceed the *Liturgy*, either in urgency of petition or in fervour of thanksgiving. In truth, if a whole assembly were addressing God in *the spirit of the Liturgy*, as well as in *the words*, there would be nothing to compare with such a spectacle upon the face of the earth: it would approximate more to heaven than any thing of the kind that was ever yet seen in this world.

Taking, then, the formularies of our Church in a collective view, I must say, that we have unbounded reason for thankfulness to Almighty God for the provision which has been made for the instruction of our minds, and the assistance that has been given us for our advancement in the divine life.]

Now, then, let me state to you,

III. The claim which the Prayer-book and Homily Society has upon us in this particular view—

[Here a summary view was given of the services rendered by that Society to the world. And they were shewn to be such as to deserve the countenance and support of every pious man. Its having translated our *Liturgy* into so many languages, renders it an institution of far greater importance than would, at first sight, be supposed: for, if Bible Societies and Mission Societies are useful in *gathering Churches*, this is useful

in confirming, establishing, comforting, and edifying all who are so united — — —]

Let me then RECOMMEND,

1. That these formularies be duly estimated by yourselves—

[The Homilies are too much laid aside at this time. It is well that the attention of the world is now more called to them than it has been for the last hundred years. I would recommend you all to read them for your own edification, and to circulate them for the edification of others. The Liturgy, also, is too much used as a form, without a suitable endeavour to enter into the spirit of it. But if we will, from time to time, compare our own frame of mind in prayer with the words which are provided for our use, we shall see how exceedingly defective we are in every thing that is good; and how much we need a supply of the Spirit of God to bring us to any measure of that experience which we are bound, as Christians to attain — — —]

2. That your regard for them be shewn by your endeavours to circulate them throughout the world—

[From the records of that society, you will see that nothing but a want of funds has prevented a still greater extension of their labours than has yet taken place. If the generosity of the Christian public enable them to proceed according to their wishes, there will not be a country under heaven that will not, in due time, be blessed with the same advantages as we enjoy.]

MDXX.

THE FORCE OF IMPORTUNITY.

Luke xi. 5—8. *And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him? And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth.*

IT is common with proud infidels, when disputing against the doctrines of our holy religion, to reduce Jehovah, as it were, to a level with man; and to argue, that what would be unsuitable for man to do towards

his fellows must therefore be unsuitable for God to do in his dealings with mankind. But what know we of Jehovah, that we should presume to judge of him by ourselves? or what claim have we on God, that we render him amenable to us for his dispensations towards us, when we might, every one of us, have been justly left, like the fallen angels, to have taken our portion in the abyss of hell, if He, of his sovereign grace, had not determined to put a difference between us and them? To bring Jehovah to our bar, and to try him there by a standard of our own, is impious in the extreme. His ways and thoughts are infinitely above ours; “nor will He give account to us of any of his matters:” and our province, in reference to his revealed will, is, not to dispute, but to believe, and to obey. Yet there are circumstances wherein we may, with great propriety, draw a parallel between God and ourselves: as, for instance, if there be any thing good which man will do, we may be perfectly assured, not only that God will do the same, but that he will infinitely exceed it. Thus our Lord, having taught his Disciples to pray, and wishing to encourage in them the utmost urgency and fullest confidence of success in prayer, he appeals to them respecting the effect of importunity between man and man, and teaches them to expect still greater effects from it in their addresses at the throne of grace. From this appeal of his, I will take occasion to shew,

I. The force of importunity in our intercourse with man—

[Our Lord supposes *a sudden emergency to have arisen*. A friend, on a journey, having lost his way^a, and wandered about till midnight, suddenly comes to our house, oppressed both with fatigue and hunger; and, whilst we joyfully afford him a lodging, we accidentally have no provision, not so much as a piece of bread, to set before him for his refreshment. (This is a case which may very well be supposed; nor is there in it any thing so extraordinary, but that it may fitly serve as a basis for a hypothetical proposition.) *To what expedient would you have recourse?* You yourself have a friend near at

^a See the marginal translation.

hand; and, whilst the weary traveller rests himself, you go to him, and knock at his door, and entreat him to lend you some bread for the occasion. (This, though undesirable in itself, on account of the unseasonableness of the hour, you would feel justified in resorting to, on account of the greatness of the emergency.) *Your friend*, who, with his children and servants, are all in bed, not liking to be disturbed at such an hour, and to have the disturbance spread over his whole family, excuses himself, and *declines acceding to your request*. (This is perfectly natural. What relates to *self* arises much more quickly in our minds than the concerns of others; and the trouble imposed on us, appears more immediately deserving our attention, than any which we are called upon to alleviate in others.) *But* you continue to plead with him the necessity of the case: and *his friendly dispositions*, which had not been sufficient to operate in your favour in the first instance, *are awakened and called into exercise by your importunity*; and he then arises, and gives you whatsoever you require. (In the whole of our intercourse with our friends, and indeed with the world at large, we find, that a perseverance in urging our requests will prevail, when higher considerations have lain dormant, and been ineffectual for the attainment of our wishes.)

This case is so simple, that it would be obscured, rather than elucidated, by any amplification of mine: it commends itself at once as a very probable occurrence, and as well fitted to illustrate the great truth which it was intended to inculcate.]

Let us, then, proceed to notice,

II. The encouragement to be derived from it in our intercourse with God—

Our blessed Lord himself shews us how to apply the subject; first of all in a way of direct affirmation, “Ask, and *ye shall have*,” &c.; and then in a way of inference; namely, “If we, who are evil,” will not refuse to supply the necessities of others, “*much less will God*,” who is so infinitely good^b. To mark this inference, let the following considerations be duly marked:

1. Importunity, however urgent, will never offend our God—

Man it *may* offend; and not unfrequently *does*; and even irritates him to such a degree, as to draw from him expressions, which, in a calmer hour, he would not, on any account, have used. But God will never be offended: on the contrary, he

tells us that “the prayer of the upright is his delight.” To what an amazing extent did he bear with the importunity of Abraham, when, in a long strain of consecutive petitions and arguments in behalf of Sodom, he urged the sparing of that guilty city for the sake of fifty, forty, thirty, twenty, yea, even ten righteous persons, who might be there! So, we may be sure, he will never be displeased with us, though we “cry to him night and day,” and “wrestle with him, as Jacob did, refusing to let him go until he bless us^c.”]

2. Nor can our petitions ever be unseasonable—

[Unseasonable they may often be, if made to man. His occupations may not admit of his attending to them at the time they are offered. But no hour is unsuited for our supplications to God. He is never disinclined to listen to the case which we spread before him, nor ever so occupied as to defer it to a season of greater leisure. We find the Scripture saints “preventing the night watches” in their addresses at the throne of grace^d; and, however sudden the emergency that calls for his attention, he has shewn himself, at all times, equally disposed to fulfil the desires which have been expressed even by a sigh, a look, a thought^e.]

3. Nor can they ever exceed either his power or willingness to give—

[The friend who was applied to for bread, might have been in the same predicament with him who made the application: or, as was the case, he might, on some account or other, be unwilling to grant the request. But God is never either unable or unwilling to grant all that we can ask. On the contrary, we are assured, that he is “able to do for us exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask, or even think.” The weakest or the vilest of the whole human race should “find mercy and grace to help him in the time of need,” if only he sought it in Jesus’ name: nor should all the glory and felicity of heaven be withheld from one who applied to God in penitence and faith. “However wide he opened his mouth, God would fill it.”]

4. Importunity is the very mean which God himself has prescribed for our obtaining of blessings at his hands—

[He bids us not only to pray, but to “continue instant in prayer;” yea, to “pray without ceasing,” and to “give him no rest” till we have obtained the blessings which we have desired^f. He has spoken a parable, for the express purpose

^c Gen. xxxii. 26.

^d Ps. cxix. 148.

^e Exod. xiv. 15. Neh. ii. 4.

^f Isai. lxxi. 6, 7.

of shewing us, that “we are to pray always, and not faint^g.” Immediately after my text, the encouragement given by our Lord to importunity in prayer is conveyed with such *remarkable repetitions*, as cannot fail to strike every attentive reader, and to shew *how urgent God is with us, to make us urgent* in our supplications to him.]

APPLICATION—

1. Seek friendship with God—

[A man may expect to prevail with a *friend*, for things which he could not hope for as a *stranger*. And what may we not expect to obtain at God’s hands, if once we are reconciled to him in the Son of his love? Having given us his own Son, what will he withhold from us^h? If, indeed, we continue enemies to God in our hearts by wicked works, we cannot hope to obtain any blessings at his hands; for we are warned, that “if we regard iniquity in our hearts, the Lord will not hear us:” but, if we come to him in Christ Jesus, with penitential sorrow, “he will never suffer us to seek his face in vain.”]

2. Whatever you ask of God, ask it in faith—

[If you come with doubtful hearts, questioning whether God be able or willing to relieve you, you cannot hope to obtain an answer of peace^l. But the prayer of faith shall surely prevail. Whatever be the petition which we offer, provided only it be really good for us, it shall be given us^k. True, the cup was not taken from the hands of our blessed Lord, nor was the thorn taken from the flesh of the Apostle Paul, though both the one and the other urged their petitions with repeated earnestness: but our blessed Lord was enabled to drink the cup of bitterness even to the dregs, and the Apostle had his affliction greatly sanctified to the good of his soul: and therefore, though the blessings asked were withheld from each, as to the *matter of them*, they were more effectually bestowed on each as to *their ultimate effect*. Thus, only leave to God to judge for you as to the gift that shall be conferred, and you shall be sure never, in any case, to ask in vain.]

3. Never be discouraged on account of any delay you may experience in the answers to your prayers—

^a [The importunate widow, though often repulsed, prevailed at last: and though God may not answer us so speedily as we could wish, it shall, in fact, be “speedily,” because it shall be at that precise moment when it shall be most for our eternal good. There are many reasons known to God for delaying to

^g Luke xviii. 1—8.

^h Rom. viii. 32.

^l Jam. i. 6, 7.

^k John xv. 13, 14. and xvi. 7.

answer our prayers; and which, if known to us, would lead us to acquiesce in, and even to desire, the delay. We need to be stirred up to more importunity in prayer, and to be made more deeply sensible of our need of mercy. We need also to be made more thankful to God for his answers to prayer: and all these benefits may arise from delay. But, beyond the proper season, God will not withhold any communication which, in his wisdom, he sees needful for us. His declaration to this effect may be fully depended on: "The vision is for an appointed time; but at the end it shall speak, and shall not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come; it will not tarry¹." Only wait for the Lord, and you shall never be disappointed of your hope.]

¹ Hab. ii. 3.

MDXXI.

IMPORTUNITY ENCOURAGED.

Luke xi. 9, 10. *I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened^a.*

THE prayer which our blessed Lord taught to his Disciples, and which is contained in the verses before my text, is suited to the Church of God in all ages: and it is a very encouraging circumstance, that, in approaching to the throne of grace, we are able to address the Most High in words which he himself has dictated for our use. But doubts are apt to arise in the mind, whether God will hear the prayers of such worthless and sinful creatures as we are: and, to remove such apprehensions, our merciful and gracious Lord has made an appeal to us respecting our own readiness to assist each other, especially in cases of emergency, and when urged by repeated

^a This was written at a great distance of time from that which precedes it, and without any consciousness that the text had been treated before. The reader will excuse a little repetition, for the sake of the different ground occupied in the two Discourses. This was, in fact, preached from Luke xi. 5—10. But the insertion of it will shew to young ministers how greatly the same subjects may be diversified; to illustrate which, is an object that the Author has much at heart.

applications. The appeal, as made by him, carries conviction to the mind. But the argument itself must not be pressed too far. We cannot, in all cases, infer from what man would do, that God will do the same: no, in truth; such a mode of arguing as that would lead, and often does actually lead, to the most fatal errors. I will therefore make the necessary distinctions on this subject; and shew,

I. In what cases this argument is valid—

Certainly it is an argument much used in Holy Writ—

[Our blessed Lord states it distinctly in the words following my text: “If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, *how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him*^b?” To the same effect he speaks in the parable of the unjust judge: “Hear what the unjust judge saith. *And shall not God avenge his own elect, who cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you, that he will avenge them speedily*^c.” From these and many other passages it is clear, that the argument, *if properly used*, is weighty and conclusive.]

But it is an argument much abused by ungodly men—

[Nothing is more common than for ungodly men to state what they themselves would do, and to conclude from thence what they are authorized to believe respecting God. And, in fact, this is the strong-hold of atheism itself: for there is not a perfection of the Deity which is not *practically* denied upon this very ground. Hear how God himself represents this matter: for he who knows the heart, and can interpret infallibly its most secret motions, thus declares, respecting the atheistical and ungodly world: “Son of man, hast thou seen what the ancients of the House of Israel do in the dark, every man in the chambers of his imagery? For they say, The Lord seeth us not; the Lord hath forsaken the earth^d.” What is here, but a plain denial both of the *omnipresence* and *omniscience* of God? His *justice* also, and his *truth*, are alike questioned by them upon the same grounds. St. Paul thus states the objections of an unbelieving Jew: “But if our

^b ver. 11—13.

^c Luke xviii. 2—8.

^d Ezek. viii. 12. and ix. 9. See also Ps. x. 11. and Job xxii. 13, 14.

unrighteousness commend the righteousness of God," *i. e.* if our ungodliness be the means of displaying the efficacy and excellency of the Gospel, what shall we say? Is God (*i. e.* is *not* God) unrighteous, who taketh vengeance? (I speak as a man.) God forbid (replies the Apostle): for then, how shall God judge the world? Then the objector, still pressing his argument, adds, "For if the truth of God hath more abounded through my lie unto his glory (*i. e.* if God has overruled my errors for the illustration and confirmation of his own truth), why am I yet judged as a sinner?" that is, if I am the means of honouring him, whether intentionally or not, it would be very unjust in God to deal with me as if I dishonoured him. To all which the Apostle answers, 'You may as well speak out at once, and say, "Let us do evil, that good may come:" and the only reply that I shall condescend to make to all such impious objectors is, "Their damnation is just^e." Thus, as the justice of God is arraigned in reference to what he has threatened; so also is his truth, in reference to his execution of his threatenings: "There shall come, in the last days, scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation^f;" construing thus the forbearance of God into an utter dereliction of his declared purpose. The *sovereignty* of God is that against which they set themselves with peculiar vehemence. That God should exercise mercy according to his own sovereign will and pleasure, and not according to any desert of man, is an idea which they cannot endure. They consider *that* as a warrant to cast all the blame of their condemnation upon God himself; and will confidently say, "Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?" But St. Paul's answer to that objection must silence every human being: "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour^g?" In a word, the whole that God has revealed to us respecting our fall in Adam, our condemnation by the law, our justification by faith alone, and the eternity of future punishment awarded to all who believe not in Jesus Christ; the whole of this, I say, is no better than "foolishness" in the eyes of unconverted men^h. And the ground of their accounting it foolishness is, that it is a different mode of proceeding from that which they themselves would follow towards one another: for, as they would not punish to

^e Rom. iii. 5—8.

^f 2 Pet. iii. 4, 9.

^g Rom. ix. 18—21.

^h 1 Cor. i. 23.

all eternity any offence committed against them, so neither ought God to punish sin in that way; and, as they would reward men according to their merits, so ought God to do. In short, they think "God to be altogether such an one as themselves: but God will reprove them, and, with righteous severity, will set before them the things which they have doneⁱ:" for, however just a comparison between God and man may be in some respects, in other respects it can serve no other purpose than to lead us into the most fatal errors.]

Let me, then, mark distinctly, when, and in what cases, this argument is valid—

[There is a broad line of distinction to be drawn, and such a line as will suffice to keep us from any material error on the subject. *When the comparison relates only to what is good and gracious*, the argument founded on it is not only valid, but may be carried to an extent that would be utterly inadmissible on any other subject under heaven. For instance, we may not only say, if an earthly parent will be kind to his child, how much more will your heavenly Parent be so? But we may put the argument thus: "If a man will shew the smallest kindness imaginable to his beloved child, how much more will God exercise the greatest possible kindness towards a stranger, provided that stranger call upon him in humility and faith?" This is, in fact, the very statement which our Lord himself gives in the verses following my text: for it is worthy of notice, that, in the latter part of the comparison, he drops *the relation of a child*, and says, "How much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit unto *them that ask him*^k?" But, *when the comparison supposes or implies any claim on God*, then is it not only vain, but impious in the extreme: for man has no claim whatever upon God. The very devils have as much claim upon him as we, unless we come to him in the name of Christ. On our fellow-creatures we have a claim; but on God we have none: and if we presume to say, I would not act so or so towards a fellow-creature; therefore God will not act so or so towards me; we reduce him to a level with ourselves; we bind him by laws to which he is not subject; and we prescribe rules to him which he will never follow. Of our duties to man we may form some judgment: but "we

ⁱ Ps. l. 21.

^k A similar statement we have in the Epistle to the Hebrews (ix. 13, 14.): "If the blood of bulls &c. will do the smallest thing, *i. e.* will cleanse *the body* from a mere *ceremonial* defilement, how much more will the blood of Christ, &c. do the greatest, *i. e.* cleanse *the soul* from all manner of *moral* defilement, and sanctify it wholly unto the Lord?"

cannot by searching find out God^l;" who dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, or can see^m:" and if we attempt to speak of him, we only "darken counsel by words without knowledgeⁿ."]]

Having shewn in what cases this argument is valid, I proceed to mark,

II. The force of it, as here applied—

Our blessed Lord here institutes a comparison between God and man, as moved by importunity to exercise kindness towards a suppliant friend. Hear,

1. His statement—

[Who amongst us, if a friend came to him, even at midnight, for bread to set before one who had unexpectedly come from a great distance to take up his abode with him, would refuse his request? We might, probably enough, express reluctance at first, on account of the disturbance it would occasion to our family; but, on his urging his request, we should grant it: though the feelings of friendship should not suffice in the first instance to produce an acquiescence in his wish, his importunity would be sure to prevail. The parallel between God and us is here so obvious, that our Lord forbears to state it; because every one will naturally draw it for himself. For instance: will an earthly friend act thus? What then will not our heavenly Friend do, whose love so infinitely transcends all that ever existed in a mortal bosom? And will an earthly friend do this with such inconvenience to himself and family; and shall his reluctance be overcome by dint of importunity? What then will not He do, who, at whatever hour he be applied to, can experience no inconvenience, and who delights in importunity, as the best possible expression of our love to him? Here the argument is clear and strong; and such as must carry conviction to every mind. Hear then,]

2. His conclusion—

[Justly does our blessed Lord found on this statement an exhortation to us, to be *in supplication urgent*, and *in expectation confident*. Let us "ask" whatsoever our necessities require: let us "seek" it, too, in every way that we can devise: and, if our heavenly Friend appear inattentive to our suit, let us stand "knocking" at his door, till he come to our aid. Let us take no refusal. Of his *sufficiency* we can entertain no doubt; nor should we for a moment call in question his *williness* to help us. Delays, instead of discouraging us, should only increase the ardour of our suit: for, *succeed we must*.

^l Job xi. 7.

^m 1 Tim. vi. 16.

ⁿ Job xxxviii. 2.

Our blessed Lord tells us, "Ye shall," "ye shall," "ye shall" succeed. "Ask, and *ye shall* have; seek, and *ye shall* find; knock, and *it shall* be opened unto you." Before we yield to any discouragement as to the issue of our supplications, let us find an instance wherein such importunity was ever known to fail. Let us search the annals of the whole world: and if, from the beginning of the world unto this hour, we find not one single exception, yea, and are assured by Him who knoweth all things, that no exception ever did exist; then let us, like Jacob of old, close, as it were, with our heavenly Friend, and wrestle with him all the night; and tell him plainly, that "we will not let him go until he bless us^o." If we act thus, we may as well doubt the existence of a God, as doubt the issue of our supplications: "for *every one* that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh (however unworthy he may be of the favour asked), it shall be opened."

Behold, then, the force of the argument as here applied; and know, that where goodness and grace are the points of comparison between God and man, the argument can never be too strongly put, or the inference be too securely drawn.]

APPLICATION—

Are there any here present who doubt the efficacy of prayer?

[Such existed in the days of old; even men who said, "What profit should we have, if we pray unto him^p?" But on what grounds can such a question be asked? If it be from an idea that God is incapable of attending to the concerns of men, then hear his indignant reproof of this atheistical conceit: "They say, the Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it. Understand, ye brutish among the people; and ye fools, when will ye be wise? He that planteth the ear, shall he not hear? He that formed the eye, shall not he see? He that chastiseth the heathen, shall not he correct? He that teacheth man knowledge, shall not he know? The Lord knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vanity^q;" aye, and ye will *find them* vanity too, my brethren, if ye persist in such conceits as these.]

Are there any who think they can be saved without prayer?

[Be assured that, however willing God is to bestow his blessings, he will be sought unto before he will impart them: for the condition he has imposed is this; "Ask," and ye shall have. And if ye will not comply with *that*, then know, that

^o Gen. xxxii. 24—28.

^p Job xxi. 15.

^q Ps. xciv. 7—11.

nothing awaits you but “destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power^r :” for he has irreversibly declared, that “the wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the people that forget God^s.” If ye say, “This shall not be ;” then will I bring to your remembrance that awful admonition, “*God is not a man*, that he should lie ; nor the son of man, that he should repent. Hath he said, and shall he not do it? hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good^t ?” God’s promises, it is true, are free and full : but “he will be inquired of,” in earnest prayer, before he will vouchsafe to you his proffered blessings^u.]

Lastly, Are there any who are discouraged by the idea that God will not condescend to *them* ?

[Persons too of this description were found in the days of old, who, in a desponding mood, complained, “The Lord hath forsaken me, and my God hath forgotten me.” But what was the answer of God to them? “Can a woman forget her suckling child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget : yet will not I forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee on the palms of my hands ; thy walls are continually before me^x.” Here is the very argument that is urged in my text, and with all the force which has been given to it. Let it come home to all your hearts, and make every one of you to “pray, without ceasing^y,” and without a doubt^z.]

^r 2 Thess. i. 9.

^s Ps. ix. 17.

^t Numb. xxiii. 19.

^u Ezek. xxxvi. 37.

^x Isai. xlix. 14—16.

^y 1 Thess. v. 17.

^z Jam. i. 6, 7.

MDXXII.

THE STRONG MAN ARMED.

Luke xi. 21, 22. *When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace : but when a stronger than he shall come upon him and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils.*

THE miracles wrought by our Lord were too manifest to be denied even by his most inveterate enemies. Some however endeavoured to evade the force of them by ascribing them to a confederacy with Satan. Our Lord shewed them the absurdity of such an idea. The expelling of evil spirits was a confirmation of our Lord’s doctrine ; consequently it tended to the destruction of Satan’s kingdom, and the

establishment of his own. *This* Satan could not but be aware of; he would therefore never concur in an act which must terminate in his own ruin. Hence it appeared that the power which Jesus exercised over the evil spirits, was not only without the concurrence of Beelzebub, but in spite of his utmost exertions to withstand it. To illustrate this truth our Lord delivered the parable before us.

Extreme caution should be used in explaining the parables, that we refine not upon them too much, nor give to any part a sense which it was not designed to bear. But some parables were certainly intended to be minutely applied in all their parts^a. That which is now before us seems to be of that number; we shall therefore open it in a way of familiar exposition.

Satan is fitly compared to a strong man armed—

[The strength and power of Satan are frequently mentioned in the Holy Scriptures. His very names, *Apollyon*^b, *the great Dragon*^c, and *the god of this world*^d, evidently characterize him as possessed of exceeding great power. As an angel, he excelled in strength^e; nor, though he has lost his original purity, has his native energy been at all impaired. He is rendered more formidable too by “his armour.” Alas! what fiery darts has he in his quiver^f! With what inconceivable subtlety does he plan his seasons and methods of assault^g! Nor can he have so long engaged in this warfare, without having learned much by experience.]

The hearts of unregenerate men are “his palace”—

[He has the most intimate access to the hearts of men: he entered into the heart of Judas, and prompted him to betray his Lord^h. By the same invisible agency he urged Ananias and Sapphira to lie unto the Holy Ghostⁱ. In the same manner he stimulates all his vassals to the commission of sin: he rules within them as a monarch^k, and lords it over them with most despotic sway^l. Every apartment of the palace is occupied by his attendants: the understanding, the will, the affections, the memory, the conscience, are all under his

^a Matt. xiii. 18—23. and 36—40.

^b Rev. ix. 11.

^c Rev. xii. 7.

^d 2 Cor. iv. 4.

^e Ps. ciii. 20.

^f Eph. vi. 16.

^g 2 Cor. xi. 3. Eph. vi. 11.

^h John xiii. 27.

ⁱ Acts v. 3.

^k Eph. ii. 2.

^l 2 Tim. ii. 26.

controul. If seven spirits only possess some, Legion is the name of others^m.]

While he takes up his abode in them, he keeps all in peace—

[One would think that a soul possessed by him should be filled with horror; but he contrives to divert the thoughts of men from all their spiritual concerns: he blinds their minds so that they cannot see their real state: he fills them with a presumptuous confidence that they shall do well at lastⁿ. Perhaps he makes them laugh at the idea of Satanic influence. He suggests that God is too merciful to inflict eternal punishment, and that all apprehensions of divine wrath are the effects of superstition or enthusiasm. If at any time they are impressed by the word of God, he catches it away, lest they should believe it and be saved^o. Thus he continually deceives his vassals, and lulls them asleep in a most fatal security.]

There is One however, even Jesus, who is stronger than he—

[Satan indeed is a roaring lion: but Jesus is the all-powerful Lion of the tribe of Judah^p. Satan is the serpent that bruised the heel of Jesus: but Jesus is the woman's seed that effectually bruised his head^q. Jesus vanquished him in repeated combats^r, and at last triumphed over him upon the cross^s: yea, and led him captive in his resurrection and ascension^t: nor does he exercise less power *in* his people than he then did *for* them^u. His grace is sufficient to fortify us against the fiercest assaults of Satan^x: nor shall the weakness of his people counteract or retard his career of victory^y.]

Nor can Satan any longer retain his hold when Jesus comes to eject him—

[Satan strove indeed to the utmost to keep possession of the bodies of men; nor relinquished them at last without the most strenuous efforts to destroy them^z. Thus will he maintain a conflict with Jesus in their souls. If he be driven from the outworks, he will defend himself in the citadel. Sometimes he may appear for a season to defy Omnipotence itself; but in due season he is invariably overcome. His strong holds, one after another, are demolished^a, and he is constrained to surrender the palace which he can no longer keep.]

^m Luke xi. 26. with viii. 30.

ⁿ Compare 1 Kings xxii. 22. with Jer. vi. 14.

^o Luke viii. 12. ^p Rev. v. 5. ^q Gen. iii. 15.

^r Matt. iv. 10. John xiv. 30. and xvi. 11. ^s Col. ii. 15.

^t Eph. iv. 8. ^u 1 John iv. 4. ^x 2 Cor. xii. 7—9.

^y Rev. vi. 2. ^z Mark ix. 20, 26. ^a 2 Cor. x. 5.

Jesus, having driven him from the soul, will turn all its powers against him—

[A sinner, while under Satan's dominion, has many things which prove serviceable to that wicked fiend: his wisdom, riches, influence, are all pressed into the service of the devil; all are used to strengthen his power, and to undermine the authority of Christ. But when Jesus has gained possession of a soul, he instantly secures all its powers, and turns the artillery of Satan against himself: whatever wealth or influence the man possessed, is now made subservient to the Redeemer's interests: the gold of Egypt is formed into vessels for the sanctuary of the Lord; and every talent is improved in promoting and establishing his kingdom^b. Thus does Jesus drive Satan from his fortress^c, and enable the once captive soul to trample on him as a vanquished enemy^d.]

From the parable thus explained we may LEARN—

1. What true conversion is—

[Conversion does not consist merely in a change of sentiment: it supposes that our false peace has been broken, and that Satan has been made to yield to the victorious grace of Jesus. Jesus himself too is now become the sole monarch of our hearts, and we are cordially serving him with all our power. Let us try ourselves by this touchstone: let us see whether we be indeed new creatures: nor let us rest till we be turned from the power of Satan unto God^e.]

2. Whence it is that any are converted—

[Men are in themselves the willing slaves of Satan: so far from desiring deliverance from him, they fight against their deliverer. Most assuredly therefore they are not the authors of their own conversion. It is Jesus alone who chooses the objects of his favour: it is he alone who begins and carries on the good work within them^f. To him therefore must every redeemed soul ascribe the glory^g. *None can boast* as if they had effected any thing by their own power^h: *nor need any despair* as though their bonds could never be broken. To every one, who wishes to be made free, there is abundant encouragement in the Scripturesⁱ. May our eyes be so directed to Jesus that his power may be magnified in our deliverance^k!]

3. What is the duty of those who are converted—

[As Satan never leaves a soul without reluctance, so does he ever watch for an opportunity to return to it: nor will he

^b 2 Cor. x. 5, 6.

^c 1 John v. 18.

^d Rom. xvi. 20.

^e Acts xxvi. 18.

^f Zech. iv. 9. Heb. xii. 2.

^g Zech. iv. 7.

^h 1 Cor. iv. 7.

ⁱ Isai. xlix. 24, 25.

^k Isai. xlv. 22.

fail of accomplishing his purpose, if our hearts be not guarded by the Lord Jesus. Let none then be satisfied with purging out only some grosser sins^l. In vain will the house be swept and garnished, if it be not occupied by the Divine inhabitant. Satan will return with seven devils worse than himself; and the last state of such men will be worse than the first^m. Let all then be on their guard, and commit the keeping of their souls to Jesusⁿ. Then shall all the attempts of their enemy be baffled. He who never slumbers will surely preserve them^o, and they shall be made *the habitation of God* to all eternity^p. What we say therefore to one, we say unto all, WATCH^q.]

^l 2 Pet. i. 9.^m ver. 25, 26.ⁿ 1 Pet. iv. 19.^o Ps. cxxi. 4—7.^p Eph. ii. 22.^q Mark xiii. 37.

MDXXIII.

THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE TRUE CHRISTIAN.

Luke xi. 27, 28. *And it came to pass, as he spake these things, a certain woman of the company lifted up her voice, and said unto him, Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked. But he said, Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.*

THE words of our Lord, though made the continual subject of cavil and dispute amongst his obstinate opposers, carried conviction to the hearts of all who candidly considered them: nor was the gentleness of his manners less impressive than the wisdom of his discourses. He had been just exposing the folly of imputing his miracles to a confederacy with Beelzebub: and to such a degree had his discourse wrought upon one of his audience, that she exclaimed out of the midst of the multitude, “Blessed is the womb that bare thee,” &c. This was the most natural language for a woman to use in expressing her admiration of him: and it furnished him with an occasion to declare before all, who, and who only, could with propriety be accounted blessed.

In his answer he sets before us,

I. The character of the true Christian—

Numberless are the ways in which this is drawn in the Holy Scriptures. But there is a peculiar

simplicity in the description before us, at the same time that it very sufficiently distinguishes the Christian from all others.

1. "He hears the word of God"—

[Every true Christian considers the preaching of the Gospel as God's instituted means of converting and edifying the souls of men. Instead therefore of making frivolous excuses for staying at home, he will suffer many inconveniences rather than absent himself from public worship. And when he is there, he will "receive the word, not as the word of man, but, as it is in truth, the word of God." He will listen to it as the word of God to his own soul in particular, and will apply to himself the truths which the minister, as God's ambassador, shall set before him.

In this he differs widely from all other persons: for though others may be regular in their attendance on divine ordinances, they do not hear the word of God with that reverence, that self-application, that submission, which become sinners in the presence of their God.]

2. He "keeps it"—

[*The godly keep it in their hearts as a ground of hope.* They do not come to the word of God, determining to receive nothing but what accords with their own pre-conceived notions; but they desire to know what method God has prescribed for the reconciling of sinners to himself: and when they find that he has sent his only dear Son to die for them, they do not say, How can this be? but they acquiesce thankfully in the divine appointment, and trust in Christ as their only Saviour^a — — —

They keep it also in their lives, as a rule of conduct. They will no longer regulate themselves according to the maxims of the world, but will inquire, What does my God require of me? What is the way in which he has directed me to walk? Having ascertained these points, he does not turn back because the world calls him precise, or because his own corruptions render his progress difficult; but he holds on in his course with firmness and uniformity. He finds many who endeavour to turn him out of the way; but he keeps the word of God, as "a light," that points out his path in general, and as "a lantern," that is to direct every step he takes — — —

It is scarcely needful to observe, that this part of the character is peculiar to the Christian; for there is no other person that can at all be compared with him in these respects.]

^a They see his suitableness, and sufficiency, and excellency, and say as Paul, 1 Cor. ii. 2. Gal. vi. 14.

Together with the character of a Christian our Lord proclaims also,

II. His blessedness—

We are not to take a general view of this subject, but to consider it in that particular light, in which it is represented in the text.

The Virgin Mary, beyond a doubt, was the most highly favoured of women, in that she was honoured with bringing into the world her incarnate God. So the angel told her; and so she expected that all future ages would consider her^b. But the true Christian, whoever he be, is incomparably more blessed than she^c.

1. He has a closer union with Christ than ever she had—

[The union which the Virgin had with Christ was that of a mother with her child. He was bone of her bone, and flesh of her flesh^d. Yet this, close as it was, cannot be compared with that which subsists between Christ and his believing people: for “he is formed in their souls^e;” “he dwells in their hearts by faith^f.” he *in them* is the hope of glory^g:” and so inseparable is this privilege from the Christian character, that, “if he dwell not *in us*, we are reprobates^h.” She was one *flesh* with him: but believers are one *spirit* with himⁱ. Her union was like that which universally obtains between parents and children; but that which believers enjoy, resembles rather that which subsists between Christ and his heavenly Father^k.]

2. He has a more intimate communion with him—

[Doubtless, till he attained to the age of thirty, she must have enjoyed many sweet seasons of communion with him under her own roof: and during the four years of his ministry, she must have had familiar access to him on many occasions. But, after all, this was no other fellowship than what every parent, and every friend, enjoys. She beheld him only as *man*; we behold him as *God*. She saw him merely as a

^b Luke i. 28, 48.

^c The Virgin, *as a believer in Jesus*, was doubtless a partaker of all the privileges that we enjoy through him: but, *simply as his mother*, she possessed none of them: and *all our assertions respecting her must be understood with this limitation*.

^d Gen. ii. 23.

^e Gal. iv. 19.

^f Eph. iii. 17.

^g Col. i. 27.

^h 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

ⁱ 1 Cor. vi. 17.

^k John xvii, 20—23.

prophet; we see him in the whole of his mediatorial character, as the King, Priest, and Prophet, of the universal Church. She heard only *partial instructions*, on *particular occasions*, with the *outward ear*: but we have access to him *at all times*, to hear *the whole* of his revealed will, and to receive instruction in our *inmost souls*.

How far preferable this is to his bodily presence our Lord himself informs us¹: and consequently our state is far more blessed than even that of his own mother.]

3. He has richer communications from him—

[She, *as his mother*, received nothing from him in this world^m; nor does she receive any thing in heaven on account of this relation to himⁿ. But every believer, *as a believer*, is blessed in him with all spiritual and eternal blessings^o. Un-speakable are the benefits he imparts to all his people. Whatever grace they possess, they have received it all out of his fulness^p. In heaven also their relation to him shall be acknowledged, and suitable honours be conferred upon them. A throne^q, a crown^r, a kingdom^s, are the inheritance that he has reserved for them, and will finally bestow upon them.

Let these things be considered, and, however blessed we may conceive the Virgin to have been on account of her relation to him, we shall see that incomparably greater blessedness is ours, provided we hear the word of God, and keep it.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who do not stately hear the word of God—

[Upon what principle can you conceive that any blessedness belongs to you, when you prefer your ease, your business, your pleasure, to an attendance on God's ordinances? Can it be imagined that God is unconcerned about the honour of his word, and that he will not notice the contempt poured upon it? Has he not repeatedly declared the very reverse^t? Whatever excuses then you may make, remember that you have not even the semblance of Christianity, so long as you remain indifferent to the public ministration of the word, and neglectful of it in your secret retirements.]

2. Those who hear the word, but without keeping it—

[There are many who are regular in their attendance on divine worship, but never regard one word they hear. They

¹ John xvi. 7.

^m Matt. xii. 46—50.

ⁿ Matt. xxii. 30.

^o Eph. i. 3.

^p John i. 16.

^q Rev. iii. 21.

^r 2 Tim. iv. 8.

^s Luke xxii. 29.

^t Deut. xviii. 19. Matt. x. 14, 15. Luke x. 16. 1 Thess. iv. 8. Heb. ii. 1—3.

are taught to come to Christ as their righteousness and strength^u; but they still cherish self-righteousness and self-dependence. They are instructed to die unto the world, and to live unto God^x; but they still continue alive to the world, and dead to God. But what will their hearing profit them, if they will not keep the word they hear? To what purpose do they cry, Lord! Lord! if they will not do his will^y? Let such then know that they deceive themselves^z; and that they must both embrace in their hearts, and exemplify in their lives, the word of God, if ever they would be blessed in their deeds^a.]

3. Those who both hear and keep it—

[Whatever the world may say of these persons, they are, and shall be, blessed. The Lord Jesus Christ pronounces them so, and will himself impart the blessedness that he has reserved for them. Go on then, holding forth, and holding fast, the word of life^b. You will find numberless temptations to forsake the good way; but keep it steadfastly unto the end. You may meet with trials for your adherence to the word; but your consolations shall be sure to abound above all your tribulations^c; and strength shall be given you according to your day^d. Even in this world you shall have no reason to repent of your steadfastness; and in the world to come your blessedness shall be complete.]

^u Isai. xlv. 24.

^x 1 Pet. ii. 24. 2 Cor. v. 15.

^y Luke vi. 46.

^z Jam. i. 22.

^a Jam. i. 23—25.

^b Phil. ii. 16.

^c 2 Cor. i. 5.

^d Deut. xxxiii. 25.

MDXXIV.

CAUTION AGAINST HYPOCRISY.

Luke xii. 1. *In the mean time, when there were gathered together an innumerable multitude of people, insomuch that they trode one upon another, he began to say unto his Disciples first of all, Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.*

RARELY, if ever, can we find a greater instance of fidelity than in the history before us. Our Lord had been dining with a Pharisee, and, even whilst he was at dinner, he upbraided the whole sect of Pharisees, and accused them of the vilest hypocrisy. This might have been thought by some a breach of hospitality; but a sense of his duty to God was paramount to every other consideration. The Pharisee

had begun with expressing his wonder that our Lord had not washed his hands before he sat down to meat; for among the Pharisees this ceremony had been magnified into a religious observance. This superstition our Lord had not chosen to sanction: and as among the Pharisees it was accompanied with a scandalous neglect of internal purity, he exposed the folly of it, and condemned in the severest terms all who substituted such a rite in the place of vital godliness. His reproofs, as might be expected, greatly irritated his indignant hearers: yet no sooner had an immense multitude assembled at the door, than he went out to them, and, in the presence of them all, enjoined his Disciples above all things to beware of that grand feature of the Pharisaic character, hypocrisy^a.

This caution, so boldly and so strongly given, deserves *our* attention, no less than that of the Disciples to whom it was spoken. We propose, therefore, I. To consider the evil against which our Lord cautioned them—

The nature of hypocrisy is far from being generally understood. Many would suppose, that conduct which was notoriously evil, would, from its notoriety, be exempt from the charge of hypocrisy; and that there could be no hypocrisy, where the person was not conscious that he was deceiving others. But that term, according to the Scripture use of it, is very extensive: and under it may be included many different forms or degrees of hypocrisy.

1. That which is known both to ourselves and others—

[Hypocrisy consists in acting contrary to our professions: and this we may do in such an open and shameless way as to manifest clearly to others, no less than to ourselves, that we are dissemblers with God.

How is it with the great mass of those who *disregard religion*? Do they cast off the Christian name also? Do they not rather account themselves Christians; and would they not

^a See chap. xi. 37 to the end. *πρῶτον* in the text, seems better to be construed with *προσέχετε*.

be highly offended if their claim to that title were disputed? Yet have they in reality as little of Christianity in their hearts and lives as the very heathen: and there is reason to believe, that they would have lived precisely as they have, if they had all the while known Christianity to be a fable; and that they would continue to live in the very same state, if now for the first time they should learn that our religion were founded in imposture. To them we may safely apply those words of the Apostle, "They profess that they know God, but in works deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate^b."

It is precisely the same with many also who *profess a high regard for religion*. They are strenuous advocates for decorum, and are very observant of outward forms; but are as far from any thing like vital godliness as the most profane — — — They may impose upon a few ignorant people, who have not an idea what religion is: but persons of the least education, who think at all for themselves, see that all those forms are a mere farce, if unaccompanied with the affections of the heart; and these formalists themselves know, and feel, and, amongst each other, will acknowledge them to be so. Of such persons St. Paul says, that "they have a form of godliness, but deny the power thereof; that, like Jannes and Jambres, (two great opposers of Moses,) they resist the truth, being men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith; and that their folly shall be manifest unto all men, as theirs also was^c."

This is the hypocrisy of many covered with so thin a veil, that every one of the smallest penetration may discover it: and if their professions be treated with respect, it is merely from a desire which every one feels to make the way to heaven as easy as possible, and to lower the standard of religion to his own attainments.]

2. That which, though hid from others, is known to ourselves—

[It is no uncommon thing for persons to embrace certain religious principles, without ever attending to their sanctifying efficacy. Such were Judas, and Ananias, and Sapphira: these did actually impose on others; they were considered by all as sound converts: but could Judas be ignorant that he was a thief? or Ananias and Sapphira that they were liars? So it is then with many professors of religion, who pass for real Christians at this time: their exterior appearance is that of sanctity; but one is dishonest, another is addicted to falsehood, another gives way to lewd desires and practices, another is under the dominion of his evil tempers. Now, notwithstanding

^b Tit. i. 16.

^c 2 Tim. iii. 5—9.

the esteem in which they may be held, must not these persons, to say the least, have many secret misgivings, or rather, if they consider at all, must they not know that their hearts are not right with God? We may see the character of such persons drawn to the life by the Apostle Paul: all their high professions and evil practices are exhibited in contrast with each other, and stand as a monument of the wickedness and deceitfulness of the human heart^d.]

3. That which, though hid from ourselves, is known to God.

[It is but too possible for persons to “seem to be religious,” and to think themselves so, at the very time that they are under the influence of some habitual evil, which proves that they “deceive their own selves, and that their religion is vain^e.” The characteristic mark of the true Christian is sincerity: he is “an Israelite indeed, and without guile^f;” attending to all the commandments equally, without partiality, and without hypocrisy^g. But the persons we refer to are partial in every part of their duty. *Their repentance* is partial: they mourn, not so much for sin, as for the consequences of their sin; nor yet for the consequences, as they respect God and his honour, but only as they respect themselves and their happiness. Even in relation to themselves, they are not grieved that sin has defiled their consciences, and hardened their hearts, but only that it has injured their character, or brought guilt and misery upon their souls. *Their faith* also is partial: it has respect to Christ as a Priest to atone for them, but not as a King to rule over them: it receives Christ for righteousness, but not for sanctification. Moreover, whilst they profess to trust in God for spiritual blessings, they cannot stay themselves upon him for temporal things, but are as ready to sink under their trials, as if they knew not from whence they came, and to give way to despondency as if they had no God to flee unto. *Their love* too is partial: it is confined to those of their own sect and party, and knows little of that expansive benevolence which was so exemplified in the Lord Jesus, when he laid down his life for the whole world, not excepting even his bitterest enemies. Moreover, *their zeal* is also partial: it is ardent in some things; in one it is violent against superstition and forms of man’s appointment; and in another it exclaims against schisms, and heresies, and divisions: but it finds no scope for exercise in things which would bear upon their own peculiar habits: it is active enough in things that gratify their feelings, and that tend to exalt their character, but slow to

^d Rom. ii. 17—23.

^e Jam. i. 26.

^f John i. 47.

^g 1 Tim. v. 21. Jam. iii. 17.

engage in any thing that appears humiliating and self-denying. In a word, the hypocrite is neither uniform nor unreserved in any part of his obedience; but betrays his insincerity, whenever his interests, his habits, or his passions are to be sacrificed to God.]

Seeing then that hypocrisy is so extensive an evil, and that our Lord judged it necessary to caution his own immediate Disciples against it, we proceed,

II. To enforce his caution—

But what words can be sufficient for this purpose? What arguments can we use to impress upon your minds the necessity of being ever on your guard against so great an evil? Consider,

1. Its subtile nature—

[We are told that “Satan can transform himself into an angel of light, and his ministers appear as ministers of righteousness^h :” from whence we may infer, that there is *no person* in whom hypocrisy may not find an asylum, *nor any act* wherein it may not have scope for exercise. It is the continual aim of Satan to infuse it into us, and by means of it to defile our very best actions. The pretexts too under which it can hide itself are innumerable. There is not any form which it cannot assume: and sanctity itself is its appropriate garb. What need have we then to watch against a principle which finds so easy admission into the heart, yet is so hard to be detected, and so difficult to be expelled! Let not any of us imagine that we are out of its reach; nor be too confident that we are free from its influence. Surely we should have a godly jealousy over ourselves in relation to it, and not only “search and try ourselves,” but pray that “God himself would search and try us, in order to see if there be any wicked way in us, and to lead us in the way everlastingⁱ.” Let us never forget that “there is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, whilst yet they are not washed from their filthiness^k ;” and that there are many who “have a name to live, but are really dead” before God^l.]

2. Its defiling influence—

[As “leaven,” a very small measure of it will soon “leaven the whole lump.” It not only debases the act with which it is more immediately connected, but renders the whole soul abominable in the sight of God. We may profess ourselves the Lord’s people^m — — — and take delight in his waysⁿ

^h 2 Cor. xi. 13, 15. ⁱ Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24. ^k Prov. xxx. 12.

^l Rev. iii. 1. ^m Isai. xlvi. 1, 2.

ⁿ Ezek. xxxiii. 31, 32.

— — — and seem most exemplary in our conduct^o — — — and yet have it all rendered vain and worthless by means of this accursed principle. What a painful thought is this, that we may be apprehending ourselves most holy and most exemplary, and yet, after all, may be found to have deceived our own souls! But so it is: “A man may think himself to be something, and yet in the sight of God be nothing but an hypocrite and self-deceiver^p.” Let us then spare no pains to purge out the old leaven, that we may be a new lump: and, as the Jews at their passover were indefatigable in their exertions to banish leaven from their houses, so let us, now that Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us, labour to banish it from our hearts, and to keep the feast with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth^q.”]

3. Its fatal effects—

[Awful indeed are the denunciations of God’s wrath against hypocrites, insomuch that to “have our portion with them” is to be exposed to his heaviest indignation^r. Nor is it gross hypocrisy only, such as is manifest to all, that so provokes his displeasure; but that also which is the most secret and refined: “the hypocrites in heart heap up wrath,” and *that* too whilst they are flattering themselves perhaps, and expecting an accumulated weight of glory^s. And oh how fearful will be their disappointment! How distressing too will it be to their more upright friends, to miss them in the regions of bliss, and to find that, after all their professions of godliness, they were not counted worthy of the kingdom of heaven^t! Consider these things beforehand. Consider that your state will be fixed by HIM, “whose eyes are as a flame of fire,” who “searcheth the heart, and trieth the reins,” and who will give to every man according to his works: and know assuredly, that whatever be now thought of your state, you will then stand or fall, according to your real character^u.

If you are disposed to ask, What shall I do to avoid this doom, I would suggest to you a few words of]

ADVICE—

1. Be not too confident of your own integrity—

[However unconscious we may be of our latent hypocrisy, it is well to be diffident of ourselves. Even Paul himself cultivated this kind of humility, choosing rather to cast himself on the mercy of his God, than to place too great a reliance on his own integrity^x. We say not, that you may not rejoice in the

^o Isai. lviii. 2, 3.

^p Gal. vi. 3.

^q 1 Cor. v. 6—8.

^r Matt. xxiv. 51.

^s Job xxxvi. 13.

^t Job xx. 4—7.

^u 1 Tim. v. 24, 25.

^x 1 Cor. iv. 3—5.

testimony of a good conscience; for this the Apostle did^y: but we recommend it to you to “rejoice with trembling:” for we are sure that such a frame of mind is most favourable to a discovery of our real principles, and most conducive to our ultimate salvation.]

2. Commit yourselves to the care of your gracious God and Saviour—

[To whom can you look for succour, but to that blessed Saviour, who has promised to “keep the feet of his saints?” He alone can “put truth in your inward parts,” and keep you “sincere and without offence unto the day of Christ.” Yet, however preserved by his grace, you will need to be washed continually in the fountain of his blood. Sprinkle yourselves then continually with his precious blood: from thence derive all your hope and peace; and doubt not but that he will both “keep you from falling, and present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy^z.”]

^y 2 Cor. i. 12.

^z Jude, ver. 24.

MDXXV.

GOD TO BE FEARED, BUT NOT MAN.

Luke xii. 4, 5. *I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him.*

AN undue regard to the good opinion of mankind operates to the production of two apparently opposite effects, namely, a hypocritical assumption of the religious character, and a cowardly concealment of it. Moreover, the same persons may be alternately tempted to both these evils, according as the one kind of dissimulation or the other may be best suited to their present circumstances. The persons most likely to feel their influence, are those who have lately begun to venerate religion, and to desire the attainment of it in their hearts. Hence our blessed Lord earnestly cautioned his Disciples against them. He began with guarding them against hypocrisy, which was the leaven that pervaded all the Pharisees;

and then he guarded them against the fear of man (which would induce them to put their light under a bushel); and, as the best antidote to it, to cultivate the fear of God^a.

The subject of our text cannot be rendered more clear by any artificial arrangement of it, nor can the words be treated in any better order than that in which they stand: we shall therefore follow them simply without any particular division.

The fear of man is a very powerful and prevailing evil—

[Scarcely does any one begin to feel a desire after salvation, but he is beset immediately with this temptation: though perhaps he never at any time regarded the good opinion of men so far as to be deterred by it from the commission of any sin, *now* he is filled with apprehensions lest this or that person should despise him. He scarcely dares look grave, lest his friends should think him melancholy; nor will he venture to acknowledge any compunction for his past iniquities, lest they should say that he is going mad. He is persuaded in his mind that they who are persecuted for righteousness' sake are on the whole in the best way; but he dares not join himself to them for fear of participating in their reproach; nor dares he shew any attachment to a minister of Christ, from whom he would wish to derive instruction, lest he should be classed with his followers. He dares not even go to a place of worship where Christ is more faithfully preached, lest he should be loaded with some opprobrious name. To bear an open testimony against sin, or to vindicate the ways of righteousness, would be an effort which he could not even contemplate without dread: so tied is he and bound with this ideal chain—the good opinion of the world.

If he have been enabled to surmount these first difficulties, he still is in bondage to fears of another kind. His father perhaps threatens to disinherit him, his master to dismiss him, his patron to turn his back upon him: the question then arises in his mind, How shall I sustain this trial? and then, to avoid the cross, he sacrifices his conscience, declines from the ways of God, and goes back again to the world: “tribulation and persecution arising because of the word, he presently is offended.” Nor is it uncommon for those who have appeared bold in the cause of Christ, to turn back, when they are called to “resist unto blood.” When Paul was first called before the Roman Emperor, there was not found one single Christian

^a ver. 1, 4, 5.

that dared to stand by him: "Every one of them forsook him." And God alone knows how any of *us* should act, if, like Daniel or the Hebrew Youths, we were called to seal the truth with our blood.]

But to be governed by this principle, is both impious and absurd—

[God expressly commands us not to harbour it in our bosoms: "Be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled^b." He cautions us against it as a fatal snare: "The fear of man bringeth a snare^c." He represents it as quite absurd: "Who art thou, that thou shouldst be afraid of a man that shall die, and forgettest the Lord, thy Maker^d? And in our text he shews how impotent man is, and unworthy to be regarded as an object of fear^e. Man may prevail so far as to kill our bodies; but this is the utmost that he can do. In doing this, he may exercise his ingenuity to put us to the most cruel torture: but God has graciously appointed that the body should not endure all that our enemies might wish to inflict: the soul will take its flight, if the body be too violently assailed, and will leave the body insensible to all that the most insatiate malice can devise^f. Now we grant that this is an evil: the Christian cannot be indifferent to pain, and anguish, and death; but still these things are not so formidable as to justify his being influenced by the fear of man. If, indeed, there were no state beyond the present, and no Being that was superior to man, and able either to recompense our sufferings or to inflict others more severe, then there were some reason why we should fear man: but]

God is the more proper object of fear—

[*Him* we ought to fear; indeed "he is very greatly to be feared;" for "with him is terrible majesty:" we should therefore "stand in awe of him," and "fear him always," and "walk in his fear all the day long." We should do nothing without considering first whether it will please or displease him: if we have reason to think that it will displease him, we should not for the whole world presume to do it; nor should we neglect any thing which our conscience tells us will be pleasing in his sight. In every thing that we do, we should have respect to his will, as *the reason*; his word, as *the rule*; and his glory, as *the end*, of our actions. In comparison of his favour, all earthly considerations should dwindle into nothing: the allurements or the terrors of the world should be alike contemptible in our eyes: they should weigh no more with us than the small dust upon the balance.]

^b 1 Pet. iii. 14.

^c Prov. xxix. 25.

^d Isai. li. 7, 8, 12, 13.

^e Compare Isai. li. 13. with the text.

^f Job iii. 17—19.

There is very abundant reason why we should fear him—

[The circumstance of our being his creatures, formed by him for the promotion of his glory, should of itself induce us to regard him chiefly, him continually, him exclusively: and the circumstance of his having redeemed us by the blood of his dear Son, should constrain us irresistibly to live altogether for him. But the consideration urged in our text is that which we are more particularly called to notice.

God can destroy the body, as well as man^g. He commissioned worms to execute his vengeance on a prince that robbed him of his glory^h. And on many of his own peculiar people also has he inflicted punishment, visiting them with sickness and death for their transgressions against himⁱ. In this respect then, to say the least, he is on a par with men, and is as much to be feared as they. *But he can also wound the soul*, which man can never touch. The saints of old, instead of being grieved at “the spoiling of their goods, took it joyfully.” Paul and Silas, when their backs were torn with scourges, and their feet fastened in the stocks, so far from having their spirits hurt, were filled with unutterable joy, and “sang praises to God at midnight.” And every saint is privileged to “take pleasure in afflictions,” and to “glory in tribulations;” so little is it in the power of man to hurt his soul. But what distress cannot God inflict? Look at Judas: look at many also at this day, who, like him, “choose strangling rather than life.” Whence arise the numerous suicides that we hear of continually? God lets loose his wrath upon the souls of men on account of their iniquities; and then they are so miserable that they cannot endure to live. The saints themselves, too, are sometimes made to experience his frowns: and then how inexpressible is their anguish! “A wounded spirit who can bear?” Here then God shews his superiority over man, even in this life. But *God’s power extends also to the future world*: he can cast the soul into hell; and can raise up the body also, and re-unite it to the soul, and make them monuments of his everlasting vengeance. Oh! “who knoweth the power of his anger?” Who can tell us what it is to lie down in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone, and to spend an eternity in that place, “where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched?” Read a faint description of their state, drawn by the hand of an angel^k; and you will then see that “it is indeed a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

Now judge *whom* you ought to fear^l. Now see why our

^g “After HE hath killed.” ^h Acts xii. 23. ⁱ 1 Cor. xi. 30.

^k Rev. xiv. 10, 11.

^l Jer. x. 6, 7.

blessed Lord so often, and so emphatically, repeats the same word, “*Fear not* man; but I will forewarn you whom you *shall fear*; *Fear God*; yea, I say unto you, *Fear HIM*.” Alas! that the stupidity of our hearts should ever make such repetitions *needful!* but since our blessed Lord has condescended to make use of them, I pray God that our obduracy may not also render them *ineffectual.*]

We acknowledge that these considerations are awful; but we state them to you as proofs of our love—

[To speak of the wrath to come is always painful, and frequently offensive. Persons are apt to imagine that we take pleasure in alarming the minds of men; and they even conceive of us as disturbers of the public peace, and as enemies to the happiness of our fellow-creatures. But was this the character of our blessed Lord? or did he feel any thing but love, whilst he gave these solemn admonitions? Yea, did he not account this fidelity to their souls the strongest expression of his regard? Hear how carefully he marks this in his address to them: “I say unto you, *my friends.*” Permit me then to say, that, however men may be disposed to represent our fidelity as an indication of harshness, we are actuated only by a spirit of love, and are in reality your best *friends.* Many there are, indeed, who *call themselves* your friends, who would give advice directly contrary to ours: they would say, ‘Do not indulge any foolish fears about the wrath of God; HE is a very merciful Being; and you have nothing to fear at his hands. But think how absurd you will appear in the sight of all sensible men: think how you are ruining all your prospects in life: think what troubles you will bring upon yourself by these needless singularities: shake off all these groundless apprehensions: turn your back upon those who would fill you with false alarms: and act so as to ensure the approbation and esteem of all around you.’ This, I say, is the common advice of parents, of brethren, and of many others who *call themselves* friends: but think a moment whether *their* counsel or that of *Christ* is to be preferred: *they* say, ‘Fear *man*, but not *God*,’ and *Christ* says, “Fear *God*, but not *man.*” Truly, brethren, we *must* join in the advice of Him who has *proved* himself your friend; has proved it by laying down his life for you: and we must declare to you that, whilst the fear of *man* is folly in the extreme, “the fear of *God* is the beginning of wisdom, and the praise of *it* endureth for ever.”]

With this feeling, we URGE them upon your minds with some additional arguments—

[The minor sorts of persecution are unworthy the regard of a rational man. What signifies a reproachful name, or the

contempt of those who contemn God? You should rather account it your honour to be so treated^m. But whatever be the cross you are called to bear, God has provided abundant consolation under itⁿ. Only submit to your trials with meekness and patience^o, and you may defy the confederate hosts of earth and hell^p. Think how your Saviour suffered, not only “enduring the cross, but *despising* the shame;” and arm yourselves with the same mind^q, “rejoicing that you are counted worthy to suffer for his sake.” If you are tempted at any time to obey man rather than God, then look to the eternal world, and consider whether temporal joys or sorrows deserve a thought in comparison of those that are eternal. Think of the noble army of martyrs who are gone before, sent by *men*, as it were, in a *fiery chariot* to heaven: do they *regret* that they loved not their lives unto death? Thus, setting eternity before you, implore help from your God and Saviour: then shall you be found “faithful unto death, and finally obtain a crown of life.”]

^m 1 Pet. iv. 14.

ⁿ 2 Cor. i. 5. Matt. v. 10—12.

^o What dignity was there in that conduct of Jeremiah! Jer. xxvi. 14.

^p Isai. li. 5—9.

^q 1 Pet. iv. 1. Heb. xii. 3.

MDXXVI.

CAUTION AGAINST COVETOUSNESS.

LUKE XII. 15. *And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness.*

THE instructions which our Lord conveyed to his Disciples almost always arose out of something that was immediately before him; so attentive was he to improve every occasion for their good. This was fraught with many advantages; for it tended to impress every truth more forcibly on their minds, and to shew them how to render all events subservient to their own spiritual welfare. It was a trifling circumstance, which of itself did not seem to afford any particular occasion for remark, that gave rise to the discourse before us. A man who had been listening to him for some time, apprehending that, as he spake with such authority, he could easily prevail to settle a point in dispute between his brother and himself, requested his interposition; “Master, speak to my

brother, that he divide the inheritance with me." But our Lord, seeing that the man was more intent on his temporal than on his spiritual advancement, not only declined the office, as not being within his commission, but began to caution his Disciples against that covetousness, of which they now saw so striking an example.

A caution so solemnly given to them, cannot but deserve the attention of his followers in every age; and I pray God that the importance of it may be felt by every one of us, whilst we shew,

I. How we may know whether we are under the influence of this evil principle—

It is not by overt acts of dishonesty merely that we are to judge of this, but by the workings of our hearts in reference to the things of this world. We may judge of it,

1. From the manner in which we *seek* them—

[Earthly things may certainly be desired, provided that desire be regulated by the necessities of our nature, and subordinated to the will of our heavenly Father. But if we desire them *for themselves*, or *in an undue degree*, then immediately are we guilty of that very sin which is reproved in our text. If we desire them for themselves, we shew that we think there is some inherent good in them: whereas they are altogether worthless, except as far as they are necessary for our support, and for the strengthening of our bodies to serve the Lord. All beyond mere food and raiment is an empty bubble. To invest earthly things with any inherent excellency, is to put them in the place of God, and to make idols of them: moreover, if our thoughts run out after them more than after God and heavenly things, if the pursuit of them be more delightful to us than the exercises of devotion, and, above all, if we will violate the dictates of conscience, or neglect spiritual duties in order to advance our temporal interest, what is this but covetousness? Can any one doubt whether such a preference to earthly things be sinful? Suppose, for instance, that any man follows an unlawful trade, or a lawful trade in an unlawful way, acquiring his gains from sources which he would be ashamed to confess, and afraid to have discovered; is he not under the influence of covetousness? Does he not prefer money before a good conscience, and the acquisition of wealth before the approbation of his God? Is this a "setting of his affections on things *above*, and not on the things on the earth?" Hear what an

inspired Apostle speaks respecting the criminality and danger of such desires: "Many walk, of whom I have told you often, and tell you now even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, because they *mind* earthly things^a." It is not *every* degree of attention to earthly things that he condemns; but such a desire after them as is inordinate, and such a pursuit of them as militates against the welfare of the soul: and, whatever *we* may call it, *God* calls it covetousness, and declares it to be idolatry^b.]

2. From the manner in which we *enjoy* them—

[As all desire after them is not prohibited, so neither is all enjoyment of them; for "God hath given us all things richly to enjoy." But what if we feel complacency in the idea of wealth, and place a confidence in it as a barrier against the calamities of life; Is not this the very sin against which the Prophet Habakkuk denounces a most awful woe? "Woe to him that coveteth an evil covetousness to his house, that he may set his nest on high, that he may be delivered from the power of evil^c." It is, in truth, to act the part of the Rich Fool in the Gospel, and to say, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years, eat, drink, and be merry?" We are very apt to imagine that the satisfaction which we take in the contemplation of our wealth, is nothing but an expression of thankfulness to God: but it is, for the most part, a "glorying in riches" (which is expressly forbidden^d); and a "saying to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence." The sentiments of Job on this head were far more correct than those of the generality even of enlightened Christians: "If," says he, "I rejoiced because my wealth was great, and because mine hand had gotten much, this were an iniquity to be punished by the Judge; for then I should have denied the God that is above^e." If it be asked, How such a construction can reasonably be put on a sensation of the soul, which appears both innocent and praiseworthy? I answer, That God is the true and only Rest of the soul^f; and that, in proportion as we look to the creature for comfort or support, our hearts of necessity depart from him^g. To be the one source of happiness to his creatures, is his prerogative; and his glory he will not give to another: for "the Lord our God is a jealous God."]

3. From the manner in which we *support the loss* of them—

[Christianity is far from inculcating a stoical apathy, or rendering us strangers to the common feelings of mankind:

^a Phil. iii. 18, 19.

^b Col. iii. 5.

^c Hab. ii. 9.

^d Jer. ix. 23.

^e Job xxxi. 25, 28.

^f Ps. cxvi. 7.

^g Jer. xvii. 5.

but it gives us a principle, which is able to support us under trials, and to fill us with joy in the midst of tribulations. In a word, it presents us with a view of God as our God, and shews us, that nothing in this world can either add to, or take from, the happiness of him who has so rich a portion. This is the principle which enabled Job, under the loss of all his worldly possessions, to say, “The Lord gave, and the Lord taketh away: blessed be the name of the Lord.” Now the want of this resignation argues an undue value for the things of this world. If, under an apprehension of some loss, we are filled with anxiety, so as to be quite unfitted for an attention to our spiritual concerns; if, on having sustained that loss, we give way to vexation and grief, instead of rejoicing that we have in God an all-sufficient portion; do we not then in effect say, like Micah, when he had lost his idols, “They have taken away my gods, and what have I more?” Assuredly this is an undeniable mark of covetousness: indeed, God himself puts this construction upon it: “Let your conversation be without covetousness, and be content with such things as ye have^h.” When we are truly delivered from this evil principle, we shall be able to say with the Apostle, “I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content: I know both how to be abased, and how to abound; every where and in all things I am instructed, both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer needⁱ.”]

Our next inquiry must be,

II. Why our Lord so earnestly guards us against it—

The terms in which he expresses the caution, are exceeding strong; “Take heed, and beware^k.” But there is abundant occasion for such earnestness; for covetousness is,

1. A common principle—

[The man who came to desire our Lord’s interposition, seems not to have had the smallest idea that he was actuated by this unworthy principle; and probably would have complained of a want of charity in any one who should have imputed it to him. And so it is at this time. However ready we may be to notice it in others, we all overlook it in ourselves, and cloke it by the name of industry or prudent care; so that, if we were to give credit to every man’s account of himself, we should not find this principle in the world. But it is deeply rooted in the heart of man^l, and as naturally

^h Heb. xiii. 5.

ⁱ Phil. iv. 11, 12.

^k Ὁρᾶτε καὶ φυλάσσεσθε.

^l Mark vii. 21.

adheres to the soul as the members to the body^m. Even good people still feel its existence and operation within them. Who has not to lament, that in his intercourse with the world he feels somewhat of an undue bias at times, inclining him to lean towards his own interests, and to decide a doubtful point in his own favour? We do not say, that a good man will *indulge* this principle, but that he will *feel* it; and that he will find within himself a necessity of being much upon his guard, to prevent it from warping his judgment and influencing his conduct. If this then be the case with respect to those who are crucified to the world, much more must it be so with those who are yet carnal and unrenewed.]

2. A delusive principle—

[We are apt to think that earthly things will make us happy: but our Lord tells us, in the words immediately following our text, that “a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things that he possesseth.” The truth is, that man’s happiness is altogether independent of earthly things. Hear how the Prophet Habakkuk speaks on this subject: “Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of my salvation.” This clearly proves, that, however destitute we may be of all earthly comforts, our hearts may overflow with peace and joy: “we may be sorrowful, yet always rejoicing, having nothing, and yet possessing all things.” On the other hand, it is certain that a man may possess all that the world can give him, and yet be miserable; or, as Job expresses it, “In the midst of his sufficiency he may be in straits^o.” How often do we see persons, after attaining more than they had ever expected or desired, far less happy than they were at the commencement of their career! We may appeal to the experience of all, whether the increase of their happiness have kept pace with the augmentation of their wealth? We are well assured, that the more sanguine any person’s expectations of happiness are from the acquisition of wealth, the greater will his disappointments be; and that every human being must sooner or later confess with Solomon, that all below the sun is “vanity and vexation of spirit.”]

3. A debasing principle—

[It is worthy of observation, that the word ‘lucre’ occurs but four times in the New Testament, and every time has the term ‘filthy’ annexed to it. Nor is this without reason; for covetousness defiles and debases the soul as much as any

^m Col. iii. 5.

ⁿ Hab. iii. 17, 18.

^o Job xx. 22.

principle of our fallen nature. Wherever it exists, it eats out every good principle, and calls forth and strengthens every bad principle, in our fallen nature. How feeble are the operations of honour, friendship, love, compassion, when covetousness has gained an ascendant in the heart! On the other hand, what injustice, falsehood, wrath, and malice will not this horrid principle produce! Well may it be said, "The love of money is the root of all evil;" for there is scarcely an evil in the world which may not arise from it. The opposition between this principle and every Christian virtue, is strongly intimated in the advice given by St. Paul to Timothy^p— and the utter abhorrence in which it is held by God, is marked^q, yea marked with an emphasis not exceeded in any part of the sacred volume: "An heart they have exercised with covetous practices; cursed children^r." O that we were all duly sensible of its hatefulness and baseness!]

4. A destructive principle—

[See it, in whomsoever it prevails, how it militates against the welfare of the soul, and destroys its eternal interests. The Rich Youth, in despite of all his amiableness, renounced all hope in Christ, rather than he would part with his possessions^s. The hearers of the Prophet Ezekiel, notwithstanding all their approbation of his ministry and their professions of personal regard, could never be prevailed upon to renounce and mortify this evil propensity^t: and we read of some in Isaiah's days, whom neither the frowns nor chastisements of Jehovah could reclaim from it^u. The great proportion of those who make a profession of religion in our day, are like the thorny-ground hearers, in whom "the good seed is choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of this life, so that they bring forth no fruit to perfection^x." But the most terrible of all examples is that of Demas, who, after having attained such eminence in the Christian Church as to be twice joined with St. Luke by Paul himself in his salutations to the saints, was turned aside at last, and ruined by this malignant principle; "Demas hath forsaken us, having loved this present world^y." Thus it will operate wherever it is indulged: it will have the same effect as "loading our feet with thick clay," when we are about to run a race; and will shut the door of heaven against us, when we apply for admission there. Of this God has faithfully warned us: and, to fix the warning more deeply in our minds, he even

^p 1 Tim. vi. 10, 11. Mark the connexion between these two verses.

^q Ps. x. 3.

^r 2 Pet. ii. 14.

^s Matt. xix. 22.

^t Ezek. xxxiii. 31.

^u Isai. lvii. 17.

^x Luke viii. 14.

^y 2 Tim. iv. 10.

appeals to ourselves respecting the justice of the sentence, and the certainty of its execution: "Know ye not, that the covetous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?^z"]

To improve the subject, and assist you in mortifying this corrupt principle, we recommend you to consider,

1. The shortness of human life—

[Who knows not, that our life is but "a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away?" Shall we then be anxious about matters which will be so soon terminated? Should we not rather live as pilgrims and sojourners, that are passing onward towards their eternal home? It will soon be of not the smallest moment to us whether we were rich or poor. The instant that the Rich Man's soul was required of him, his riches profited him not; they could not procure so much as a drop of water to cool his tongue: nor did the troubles of Lazarus leave any sting to interrupt or lessen his joys, when once he was safely lodged in Abraham's bosom. Let us then, like the holy Apostle, "die daily:" let us "weep as though we wept not, and rejoice as though we rejoiced not, and possess as though we possessed not, and use the world as though we used it not; because the fashion of this world passeth away^a.]

2. The vanity of those excuses by which men justify their sin—

[Every one has some cloak wherewith to cover his sin. One says, I only desire a competency. But a competency, in God's estimation, may be a very different thing from what it is in ours: we may be desiring so many hundreds a year; but he says, "Having food and raiment, be therewith content." Another says, "I care not for myself, but only for my family: and must not I provide for them? But we must no more covet an earthly portion for them than for ourselves: the welfare of their souls should be our great concern for them, as well as for ourselves. Another says, I am poor, and therefore cannot be supposed to be under the influence of covetousness. But the *principle* of covetousness may be as strong in a beggar as in any other person: for envy and discontent are as much branches of covetousness, as dishonesty or avarice can be. To all then, I would say, beware of the deceitfulness of sin, and the treachery of your own hearts; and be afraid, lest, after being acquitted by your fellow-creatures, you should at last be condemned by your God^b.]

^z 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10.

^a 1 Cor. vii. 29—31.

^b See 1 Tim. vi. 9. This passage is not generally understood. It

3. The infinite excellency of eternal things—

[As the Apostle says, “Be not drunk with wine, *wherein is excess*; but be *filled* with the Spirit,” so I would say; Covet not earthly things, wherein is excess; but covet heavenly things, even to the utmost possible fulness; for in them there is no excess. It is not possible to desire too earnestly, or to seek too diligently, an interest in Christ: nor can you take too great delight in the enjoyment of him, or fear too much the loss of his favour. Here is scope for all the energies of our minds. In reference to heavenly things then I would say, Covet earnestly the best gifts: enlarge your desires to the utmost extent of your capacity to receive, and of God’s ability to bestow. However wide you open your mouth, God will fill it.]

speaks of the *inclination* or *principle*; βουλόμενοι πλουτεῖν. And the danger of self-deceit in relation to it is fully stated. Eph. v. 5—7.

MDXXVII.

THE RICH FOOL.

Luke xii. 20, 21. *But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.*

HEAR we the voice of a gloomy enthusiast, a deluded bigot, or an imperious tyrant? Are these reproachful menaces the wild effusions of intemperate zeal? No: the text presents to us the just expressions of Jehovah’s indignation. Covetousness, in whomsoever found, cannot fail of provoking his utter abhorrence. A young man had applied to Jesus to procure him an equitable share of his paternal inheritance; our Lord declined any interference, as foreign from the purposes of his mission; and, knowing the disposition which had assumed the garb of equity, reproved it^a. The parable before us was spoken to enforce that reproof; and the address of God to the character there delineated, strongly intimated the danger to which the youth himself was exposed. There are, alas! too many still who are actuated by similar principles^b. For their conviction we shall inquire,

^a ver. 13—15.

^b Ezek. xxxiii. 31.

I. What were the grounds of God's indignation against the Rich Man?

No evil could attach to the Rich Man on account of the fruitfulness of his ground: nor was he altogether to be blamed for devising prudent means of securing his property. He should indeed have remembered, that there were objects enough around him whose want should be supplied from his superfluities^c: but his offence principally consisted in two things—

1. An idolatrous regard to the world—

[He imagined that the world was capable of rendering him happy, and that the enjoyment of it would be permanent for many years^d. But what could be more absurd than such expectations as these? Can affluence secure freedom from pain either of body or of mind? Can it ward off personal afflictions, or compose domestic troubles? Is there more real happiness in palaces than in the humble cottage? Does not the experience of Solomon attest the reverse of this^e? and has not our Lord himself affirmed the same^f? But, if wealth were capable of making us happy, can we secure the continuance of it a single day? Are not all exposed to such calamities as reduced Job to poverty^g? Is not the instability of riches declared in the strongest terms^h? or, if they were more stable, can we prolong our own lives? Has not the voice of Inspiration warned us against any such vain ideaⁱ? And did not the event manifest the folly of the Rich Man's expectations^k? Well then might God address him by that humiliating appellation^l; well might he deride his fruitless anxieties, and delusive hopes^m; and justly did he cut him off as a warning to others.]

2. An utter disregard of God—

[Amidst his prospects of carnal happiness he had no thoughts of God. He addressed his soul as though it had no existence beyond the body, nor any capacity superior to the beasts. Had he regarded God, how different would his speech have been! 'Soul, thou hast hitherto been too solicitous

^c It was wrong therefore to think of treasuring up "all his fruits:" perhaps too there was too much anxiety implied in, "What shall I do?"

^d ver. 19.

^e Eccl. ii. 11.

^f ver. 15.

^g Job i. 13—19.

^h Prov. xxiii. 5.

ⁱ Jan. iv. 13—15.

^k "This night," &c.

^l "Thou fool."

^m "Whose shall those things be," &c.

about the body; but now the body, through the bounty of Providence, is amply provided for. From henceforth therefore banish all anxiety about carnal things, and occupy thyself about thy spiritual and eternal interests. *Thou* shalt now be the one object of my care and attention; and the body shall be altogether devoted to thy service. God hath provided for thee a far richer portion than this world can give. Now therefore set thyself to serve him with all thy faculties and powers: bless him that he has not “required thee of me” unprepared; and the more time thou hast lost, exert thyself the more to redeem the moments that may still be allotted thee.’ Such an address would have been a just requital of the divine goodness; nor would it ever have brought upon him the judgments experienced. But such reflections were far enough from his mind. The bounties of Providence served but to confirm his sensual habits: and the donor was eclipsed by the very gifts which he bestowed. Surely then the Divine displeasure was not more than adequate to his demerits?]

The improvement which our Lord made of this parable leads us to inquire,

II. Whether there be not amongst ourselves also similar objects of his displeasure?

A man anxious about the world and regardless of his soul is a very common character in every place—

[To make provision for ourselves and families is by no means sinfulⁿ: such prudent care will very well consist with fervent piety^o: but our concern about earthly things should not preclude an attention to the soul. Our first duty is to “lay up treasure in heaven.” By embracing Christ and his promises, we may be “rich in faith;” and by exerting ourselves in his service, we may be “rich in good works.” Thus, however poor with respect to this world, we may be “rich towards God.” But how few amongst us make *this* their chief employment! How languid is our desire after “Christ’s unsearchable riches,” when compared with our anxiety about the unrighteous mammon! How cheerful, constant, and indefatigable is our labour for the body, while that for the soul is at best feeble, occasional, and reluctant!]

Every such person resembles the Rich Fool in the parable,

1. In his folly—

[He shews that he disregards his soul in comparison of his body, and that the concerns of time appear to him more

ⁿ 1 Tim. v. 8.

^o Rom. xii. 11.

important than those of eternity. What can exceed the folly of living in such a state? How will such an one, if not stupidified by sin, condemn himself in a dying hour! How will he stand amazed when he shall appear at the tribunal of God^p!]

2. In his punishment—

[Every worldling indeed is not cut off without a previous warning: but, whenever he is taken away, he is summoned before God in wrath: he is torn from the idols which he had cherished in his bosom: not the smallest portion of his former comforts is left him: he is called by an incensed master to give an account of his stewardship, and for his folly is consigned over to everlasting burnings.]

We cannot CONCLUDE without remarking, *how widely different God's sentiments are from those of men—*

[Men account us wise in proportion as we prosecute our temporal interests^q, and consider a diligent attention to our eternal welfare as a mark of weakness and folly. But God forms a very different estimate of human actions: the amassing of wealth is in his eyes like the “loading of oneself with thick clay^r”: but the laying up treasure in heaven is the very beginning of wisdom^s. Let us then study to be like-minded with God; and let us be content to be despised by man, if we may but receive a plaudit from our Judge. Let us not however carry our disregard of the world to a criminal excess. While we are in the world we should diligently perform the duties of our station^t: but our first and greatest care should be to obtain an eternal inheritance. So, whenever our soul shall be required, we shall give it up with joy, and possess our portion when the vanities of time shall be no more.]

^p Wisd. v. 4.

^q Ps. xlix. 18.

^r Hab. ii. 6.

^s Ps. cxi. 10.

^t 1 Cor. vii. 24.

MDXXVIII.

THE PRIVILEGES OF CHRIST'S FLOCK.

Luke xii. 32. *Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.*

AMONG the many faculties which exalt man above the brute creation, that of being able to look into futurity is by no means the least: but while this in many instances elevates him with hope, in many other instances it depresses him with fear. Hence he is often

filled with anxiety to secure the good he hopes for, and to avert the evil which he dreads. To discountenance this solicitude, and to teach men to live dependent upon God, is the scope of our Lord's discourse before us. And, in the text, he fortifies his own peculiar people against fear and anxiety, by reminding them of the distinguishing favour of God towards them, and the glorious provision he has made for them. To elucidate his words we shall shew,

I. What the Lord's people have to fear—

The Lord's people are but "a little flock"—

[They once "went astray like sheep that are lost:" but they have been brought home by Christ, the great and good shepherd, and have been united together by him in one fold. They are kept enclosed, as it were, and distinct from the world: they "hear their shepherd's voice and follow him: he "leads them into pastures" which he himself has provided for them: "he administers to all their wants," "strengthening the diseased, healing the sick, and binding up the broken^a." The lambs he carries in his bosom, and gently leads them that are with young^b; and, however they may feed in different pastures, he considers them all as under his peculiar care.

But they are "*a little flock.*" In every age and every place their numbers have been small: they are "the few that find the narrow way." When indeed they shall be all assembled at the last day they will be more than the stars of heaven or the sands upon the sea-shore for multitude^c. But before that period they will receive an astonishing increase: the whole earth shall be overspread with them; and *that* too in successive generations for a thousand years^d. Till that day of God's power; they will be a little flock when compared with the herds of the ungodly. At present they are only "like the gleanings of the olive-tree, two or three upon the topmost branch^e."]]

Weak as they are, they have much to fear—

[They are not exempt from the common calamities of life. In some respects they are more exposed to them than other people. They have reason to fear *wants*. In making provision for themselves, they labour under many disadvantages: they cannot use those means of acquiring wealth which the generality of the world employ without any scruple: they cannot devote *all* their time, and *all* their attention to secular engagements: they dare not neglect their soul, even if they could gain the

^a Ezek. xxxiv. 16.

^b Isai. xl. 11.

^c Rev. vii. 9.

^d Rev. xx. 4.

^e Isai. xvii. 6.

whole world by it. Moreover, they have many in the world who would be glad enough to ruin them; but few, very few, that will exert themselves much to help them forward. On these accounts they may at times be tempted to indulge excessive care, and to harbour fears of want and embarrassment. They have also to dread *sufferings*. The flock of Christ are not only subject to the trials incident to our present state, but are liable to many sufferings peculiar to themselves: they are “as sheep in the midst of wolves:” often among themselves are found some that are “wolves in sheep’s clothing:” above all, there is “a roaring lion ever seeking to devour them.” Now Christians are not only weak when opposed to Satan, but also when opposed to the world: they cannot contend with carnal weapons^f: “The servant of the Lord must not strive.” The rebuke given to Peter when fighting for his Master, sufficiently ties their hands from standing in their own defence^g. Their only weapons are faith and patience: they are to conquer indeed, but it is by suffering even unto death^h. Well therefore may they entertain fears respecting these things: for if they be not well armed with the mind that was in Christⁱ, they will faint in the day of adversity.]

But the exhortation in the text leads us to notice,

II. The antidote provided for them—

God has provided for them a “kingdom”—

[God condescends to call himself their “Father, and deals with them as his children. He has “prepared for them a kingdom” that is infinitely superior to all the kingdoms of this world. The glory of it cannot be expressed or conceived; nor will the duration of it ever end^k. This he has given to them for their inheritance. It is *his determination* to invest them with it, and *his delight* to preserve them for it — — — His almighty power is ever exercised for this purpose^l; yea, his whole heart and soul are engaged in accomplishing his gracious intentions^m.]

This is a very sufficient antidote to all their fears—

[Why should they be afraid of *want* who have God for their Father, and a kingdom for their inheritance? Can it be supposed that he who provides for the evil and unthankful, and sustains the ravens that call upon him, will neglect his own children? Will he, who of *his good pleasure* bestowed upon them all the glory of heaven, refuse them what is necessary for their present sustenance? Why too should they be afraid of

^f 2 Cor. x. 4.

^g Matt. xxvi. 52.

^h Rev. xii. 11.

ⁱ 1 Pet. iv. 1.

^k Heb. xii. 28.

^l 1 Pet. i. 4, 5.

^m Jer. xxxii. 41.

sufferings, since “not a hair of their head can perish,” “nor can even a sparrow fall to the ground, without the permission of their Father?” If he see fit to let loose the enemy for the trial of their faith, will he not support their courage, and make them “more than conquerors?” Besides, will not their “light and momentary afflictions work out for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory?” “And will not a kingdom abundantly compensate all their trials?” Surely then they should dispel all fears; and commit themselves into the hands of a faithful Godⁿ.]

ADDRESS—

1. The flock of Christ—

[God would have you without carefulness^o. He bids you cast all your care on him who careth for you^p. And shall God be so concerned about relieving your fears, and you not be concerned to honour him? O chide your unbelieving thoughts, and say, Why art thou disquieted, O my soul? Jehovah is my shepherd, I shall not want; Jehovah is my Father, I will not fear^q? Surely if you reflect on the promises he has made to you, it will be impossible for you ever to be cast down again. “Ye, my flock,” says he, “the flock of my pasture, are men; but I am your God, saith the Lord God^r.” “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you, and through the fire, you shall not be burnt^s.” Consider, “If God be for you, who can be against you?” O be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God; and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus^t.]

2. The herds of this world—

[Shall we address you in the language of the text, Fear not? Alas! not only the Scriptures, but also your own consciences, would condemn us. You may possibly have no particular cause to dread either wants or sufferings in this world, (though you cannot tell what may befall you before you die,) but may you not have to “dwell with everlasting burnings,” and want even “a drop of water to cool your tongue” in that world to which you are hastening? Know assuredly, that your numbers will not screen you from the vengeance of an angry God. If you be not of those who have put themselves under the care of the good shepherd, you will be considered as goats, and be for ever separated from the flock of Christ^u. “He will

ⁿ 1 Pet. iv. 19.

^o 1 Cor. vii. 32.

^p 1 Pet. v. 7.

^q Ps. xxiii. 1, 4.

^r Ezek. xxxiv. 31.

^s Isai. xliii. 2.

^t Phil. iv. 6, 7.

^u Matt. xxv. 32, 33.

set the sheep on his right hand, and the goats on his left." You will then find to your cost, that not God, but Satan was your father; and that with Satan must be your portion^x. It is not without much regret that God *now* gives you up to that misery^y. But in the last day he will find as much satisfaction, and be as much glorified, in your destruction, as in the salvation of his elect. He now complains, "Thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities:" but then he will say, "Ah! I will ease me of mine adversaries^z." Seek then to become the sheep of Christ. Beg him to bring you home to his fold, and to feed you in his pleasant pastures. Thus shall we all become one fold under one shepherd, and feed beside the living fountains of water to all eternity.]

^x John viii. 42, 44.^y Hos. xi. 8.^z Isai. i. 24.

MDXXIX.

THE WATCHFUL SERVANT.

Luke xii. 35—37. *Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that, when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately. Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord, when he cometh, shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them.*

SUCH is the uncertainty of life, and such the importance of eternal things, that one would suppose every one should feel the necessity of standing ready for death and judgment, even though no injunctions had been given us to that effect. But our Lord frequently insisted on that subject, and, in parables as well as in plainer terms, inculcated the duty of continual watchfulness. In the parable before us he mentions,

I. Our duty—

All of us are servants of one common Lord and Master. He is absent, and has commanded all of us to wait for his return:

1. In certain expectation that he will come—

[The time of his return is the time of death and judgment. This may be protracted, so that scoffers may say, Where is the

promise of his coming^a? But “he is not slack concerning his promise.” He is only exercising his patience and long-suffering toward the ungodly world^b; and at the expiration of the time allotted them, he will surely come.]

2. In constant readiness to receive him—

[This is the more immediate import of the metaphors in the text^c. We should gather in the affections which too often entangle our feet. “*Unite my heart to fear thy name,*” should be our daily prayer. Whatever obstructs us in the way of duty should be put away. Our graces too should be kept in lively exercise; and the one desire of our soul should be, so to have every thing within us regulated according to our Master’s will, that the very instant he shall knock, we may receive him gladly and without fear.]

To enforce the practice of this duty our Lord subjoins,

II. Motives to the performance of it—

The motives suggested in the parable are of very different kinds :

1. Encouraging—

[*Thrice* does our Lord pronounce the watchful servant “blessed^d.” Indeed what can be more blessed than to be prepared to meet our God? To such servants he promises the most exalted honour. We do not indeed conceive that Jesus will repeat in heaven any such act of condescension as he once submitted to on earth^e; but there is no expression of kindness which the meanest servant could manifest to the most beloved master, which Jesus will not manifest to his faithful servants in heaven. He has prepared the richest banquet for them; and will “feed them, and lead them unto living fountains of waters^f.” And should not this prospect stimulate us to watchfulness? Who would not perform the work when they are promised such wages?]

2. Alarming—

[What indignation would a nobleman feel, if, having

^a ver. 45. with 2 Pet. iii. 3, 4.

^b 2 Pet. iii. 9.

^c It was the custom to wear long garments, which they girded up when they were about to do any thing that required activity and exertion. And lights or torches were used at their nuptials, which were usually celebrated in the evening.

^d ver. 37, 38, 43.

^e The Romans waited on their slaves at the feast of Saturn; but we do not suppose that our Lord alluded to this, because his hearers probably were not acquainted with the fact.

^f Rev. vii. 17.

ordered his servants to be ready for his reception, he should be kept a long time knocking at the door at midnight, and find not a servant awake, or so much as a light in his house! And will not Jesus be justly indignant, if he shall find such a reception from any one of us? He tells us that he will scourge that servant with such severity as to "cut him asunder," and that he will assign him his portion among his open and avowed enemies^g. Nor will he treat in this manner those only who are riotous and debauched, but those also who neglect to prepare for his arrival^h. He will, however, make a distinction between the punishment of different servants, proportioning the stripes to the opportunities he had afforded them of knowing and doing his willⁱ. But the fewest stripes will be dreadful, and the pain of them eternal. How should such an awful consideration as this awaken us! Surely our hearts must be harder than adamant, if they be not impressed by it.]

We may IMPROVE this parable,

1. For self-examination--

[Peter asked whether it related to the Disciples? and our Lord directed them to examine themselves whether they were such servants^k? This is a proper direction for us. Are we then "*like*" such servants? — — — Let us remember that to such, and such alone, will our Lord's advent be a source of joy: to all others, what a terrible surprise will his coming be! Let us then resolve, with God's grace, to watch^l. Who would not watch, if he knew that his *house* would be assaulted by thieves? And shall we not watch to preserve our *souls*^m? Whatever be our station among men, our duty to Jesus is the same. O that we may all meet his approbation, and receive his blessing!]

2. For consolation—

[The time of his coming may appear long; but it is only as one or two watches of a single nightⁿ. How soon will this be past! and how sweet will be our rest at the expiration of it! Let us then "exercise ourselves unto godliness." Let us not sleep as do others; but let us watch and be sober^o. Let us, as dear fellow-servants, strive to keep each other awake and lively; and soon shall we hear the wished-for knock. Blessed period! May we all be found ready for it; and welcome our divine Master with songs of gratitude and triumph^p.]

^g ver. 46.

^h ver. 47.

ⁱ ver. 48.

^k ver. 41, 42.

^l Hab. ii. 1.

^m ver. 39, 40.

ⁿ ver. 38.

^o 1 Thess. v. 6.

^p Isai. xxv. 9.

MDXXX.

PUNISHMENT PROPORTIONED TO MEN'S DESERT.

Luke xii. 47, 48. *That servant, which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.*

IF there be much spoken in Scripture concerning the necessity of faith in Christ, so is there much spoken also concerning the necessity of obedience to him. The two are never to be separated: they are indissolubly connected together in God's purpose; and must be also in our attainments: they are the root and the fruit, or the foundation and the superstructure. The importance of good works is marked with peculiar force in the words before us; wherein our Lord makes known to us,

I. The ground and measure of our responsibility to God—

The *ground* of our responsibility to God is, that we are his servants—

[Every living man, from the highest to the lowest, is a servant of the Most High God. In this respect there is no difference between the king upon his throne and the beggar on a dunghill. Every one of us has his proper office to perform for him, and every one that measure of talent which He has seen fit to commit to our care. Had we been independent of him, we had had no responsibility: but, having received every thing from him, and for him, we must, of necessity, give up an account to him of all that we have received, and of all that we have done.]

The *measure* of our responsibility depends on the knowledge we have possessed of our Master's will—

[A steward has much communication with his master, and an intimate acquaintance with his will; whilst a labourer is but very partially and imperfectly informed. Of course, therefore, much more is expected from the steward, than from the labourer. Thus it is in God's family. There is much more expected of a Christian, than of a Heathen, who has never

received any revelation from God; and much more from one who has the Gospel faithfully administered to him, than from one who has never had its riches unfolded to him. The two different persons will be judged by a different law: the Heathen "being a law unto themselves;" but Christians being judged according to the opportunities of instruction that have been afforded them. Our blessed Lord told his hearers, that, "if he had not come and spoken to them, they had not had sin; but that now they would have no cloak for their sin^a." And on the same ground he warned them, that they would have a more tremendous doom than Tyre and Sidon, yea, than even Sodom and Gomorrhah, because they had possessed advantages which the inhabitants of those cities had never known, and had abused privileges which they had never enjoyed^b.]

Agreeable to this view of our responsibility will be,

II. The rule of God's procedure towards us in the day of judgment—

Under the law, certain offences were to be punished with stripes, which were awarded to malefactors according to their desert^c. Now, in a family, every servant ought to know his duty; and, therefore, if he violate it through ignorance, he is deserving of blame: but if he violate it knowingly and wilfully, he is, of course, worthy of severer reprehension. This, under the law, was particularly marked as a rule whereby to estimate and punish the faults of men: "The priest shall make an atonement for the soul that sinneth ignorantly, when he sinneth by ignorance before the Lord, to make an atonement for him: and it shall be forgiven him. But the soul that doeth aught presumptuously, the same reproacheth the Lord; and that soul shall be cut off from among his people^d."

His investigation of cases will be most exact—

[The advantages of every person for knowing and doing his Master's will, will be distinctly marked, and weighed, as it were, in the nicest balance. We form some idea of this from the offerings which were required by the Law for sins of ignorance. If a *priest* sinned through ignorance, he was to offer a *bullock* for his offence; *as were also the whole congregation*,

^a John xv. 22.

^b Luke x. 12—14.

^c Deut. xxv. 2, 3.

^d Numb. xv. 27—31.

if they erred: for the advantages possessed by a priest for knowing his duty were so superior to that of others, that an error in him was equal in enormity to the same evil when committed by the whole people of Israel. If a *ruler* sinned through ignorance, he was to bring a *male kid* for his offering: but if one of the common people erred, a *female kid* or *lamb* would suffice for him^e. Ignorance was a sin in any one of them, and demanded an atonement to be made for it^f; but its enormity varied according to the means which different persons possessed of acquiring information. Conformably with this rule will justice be administered in the day of judgment. Ministers have, beyond a doubt, by far the greatest measure of responsibility; and, if they be unfaithful to their office, must receive by far the heaviest condemnation. Magistrates too, inasmuch as their duties call for the greater, and their errors produce the more pernicious, effects upon society, must be considered as deeply accountable to God for their conduct, and as involving themselves in a peculiar measure of guilt, if they execute not aright the trust reposed in them. Indeed, every member of society, according to the extent of his information and his influence, will be responsible to God for the discharge of his appropriate duties; and, in the event of his neglecting to fulfil them, will receive from God a corresponding punishment. Such will be God's mode of judging: and]

His sentence, too, will be pronounced in perfect equity—

["Stripes," to whomsoever administered, will be proportioned, not merely to the offence committed, but to the circumstances under which they were committed. This is the rule of conduct amongst men. "Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they expect the more." If we ourselves have committed five talents to a servant, we expect a greater increase than from him to whom we have committed only two. And if there be a servant to whom we have entrusted only one, we expect a suitable improvement even of that one. This is what God also does: and, whilst to those who have approved themselves faithful he will give a suitable reward, he will say concerning the unprofitable servant, "Cast him into outer darkness, where shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth^g."]]

CONSIDER NOW, beloved,

1. What is the aspect of this passage upon your state—

^e Lev. iv. 3, 13, 22, 27, 28, 32.

^f Lev. v. 17—19.

^g Matt. xxv. 30.

[Not only the heathen world, but thousands of Christians also, possess not the privileges which you enjoy. Not only must you, but God himself also will, bear me witness, that I have not “withheld from you any thing that was profitable for you.” “I have not shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God:” so that, if you have neglected to fulfil it, you are altogether without excuse. Call to mind, then, the instructions that have been given you: and compare with them the state of your souls before God^h — — — Do this, and say whether you have not reason to fear that “stripes” will be your deserved recompenceⁱ — — —]

2. What is your duty in relation to it—

[Rise to the occasion. Remember whose ye are. Ye are the Lord's: ye are his by creation: ye are his by redemption: “you are not in any respect your own: ye are bought with a price; and therefore are bound to glorify God with your bodies and your spirits, which are God's^k.” Think not that ignorance will excuse you: “Say not before the angel or messenger of the Lord, that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands^l?” Search out, with diligence, the mind of God: lose no opportunity of obtaining a further acquaintance with it: and, whatsoever you know to be his will, “do it with all your might^m.” — — —]

^h Jam. iv. 17.

ⁱ Luke x. 15.

^k 1 Cor. vi. 20.

^l Eccl. v. 6.

^m Eccl. ix. 10.

MDXXXI.

THE BLOODY BAPTISM OF OUR LORD.

Luke xii. 50. *I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!*

ANY one who understands the true nature of Christianity would suppose that the religion of Jesus must of necessity approve itself to the heart and judgment of every person to whom it is proclaimed; and, above all, that the Founder of it, in whom every species and degree of excellence were combined, must, so far as his character is made known, be an object of universal approbation. But the very reverse of this has proved to be the fact, even as our blessed Lord himself declared it would be. In the verse before my text, he says, “I am come to send fire on the earth.” And in the verse after my text, he puts

the question to us; "Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division;" and such a division, too, as shall separate from each other the nearest and dearest relatives^a. As to himself, he states, that he had nothing but the bitterest persecution to expect, so long as he should continue upon earth: and that, in fact, he longed for the period when the storm should burst upon him: "I have a baptism to be baptized with: and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!"

In discoursing on these words, it will be proper for me to shew,

I. What a fearful "baptism" awaited him—

In baptism, the whole body was frequently immersed under water: and, in reference to this, our blessed Lord calls his own sufferings "a baptism;" because he was about to be wholly immersed in sorrow, and to become, to an extent that no other person ever did or could become, "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief^b."

Inconceivably great were the agonies of *his body*—

[We forbear to notice his privations during the course of his ministry: when he, on many occasions, "had not where to lay his head." We will notice only his sufferings during the short period of one single day. Follow him, after his seizure by those who were sent to apprehend him, and see how he was treated at the tribunals of his judges: see him arrayed in mock majesty, insulted in every possible way, spit upon, smitten in the face, and the crown of thorns driven into his temples: see him scourged, so that "long and deep furrows were made upon his back:" see him fastened to the cross by nails driven through his hands and feet; and the cross, with him suspended on it, descending with such violence into the hole prepared for its reception, that almost all "his bones were dislocated" by the shock^c: see him left thus in the midst of all imaginable indignities, till he should be relieved by death: surely "his visage was marred more than any man's, and his form more than the sons of men^d:" so that it may well be asked, "Was ever sorrow like unto his sorrow^e?" — — —]

^a ver. 49, 51—53.

^b Isai. liii. 3.

^c Ps. xxii. 14.

^d Isai. lii. 14.

^e Lam. i. 12.

But it was in *his soul* chiefly that his pains so much exceeded those of all other men—

[Who can conceive the agonies he endured in the garden, before his body had been subjected to any suffering from man? Then it was that the cup of affliction was put into his hands by God himself; and he was constrained to drink it even to the very dregs, till, through the agonies of his mind, the blood issued from every pore of his body, and he was, literally as it were, baptized in blood. Nor can we by any means conceive what his pure and holy mind must have endured, whilst he encountered such “contradiction of sinners against himself,” both in the courts of justice and on the cross — — — Hear him, under the hidings of his Father’s face, crying, “My God, my God! why hast thou forsaken me?” Can any finite imagination conceive of the agonies he then sustained, when the sins of the whole world were laid upon him, and the debt of the whole human race was exacted at his hands? — — —]

But if this baptism was so terrible, what reason can be assigned,

II. Why he so earnestly longed for its accomplishment—

Were it only as a woman longs for the pains which shall soon terminate in the birth of her child, he might well desire their speedy arrival, in order to their speedier termination^g. But he had far higher reasons for the desire which he expressed. He longed for this baptism,

1. Because by it the Father would be glorified—

[This, in particular, operated upon his mind, at the time that he deprecated the bitter cup: “Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again^h.” It was by this event that all the perfections of the Godhead were to be displayed — — — and therefore our adorable Saviour longed for the time when this most desirable object should be consummated — — —]

2. Because by it his own work, so far as it was to be carried on in this world, was to be completed—

[Christ had undertaken to “make his soul an offering for sinⁱ,” and, by death, to expiate the sins of our fallen race.

^f Heb. xii. 3.

^g John xvi. 21.

^h John xii. 27, 28.

ⁱ Isai. liii. 10.

Without this, all his previous labours and sufferings would be in vain. For this, therefore, he longed, that he might be able to say, "It is finished"^k — — —]

3. Because by it salvation would be wrought for a ruined world—

[This was the great work which Jesus had come to effect: and so intent was he upon it, that, when Peter would have persuaded him to spare himself, he reproved his infatuated Disciple in the most indignant terms: "Get thee behind me, Satan; thou art an offence unto me!" This was, in fact, "the joy that had been set before him;" in the prospect of which he not only "endured the cross, and despised the shame"^m, but desired both the one and the other; fully "satisfied, if only he might see at last of the travail of his soul" in the happiness and salvation of his redeemed peopleⁿ — — —]

THINK NOW, Brethren,

1. What obligations we owe to the Lord Jesus Christ!

[How amazing is it, that ever He should undertake such a work for us; and that he should persevere in it, till it was altogether accomplished! He knew from the beginning all that should come upon him: yet, so far from drawing back, "he went before his timid Disciples, and, to their utter amazement, led the way" to the place that was to be the scene of all his sorrows^o. He shewed, throughout, that the whole of his sufferings were voluntary. When, by his word, he struck to the ground the whole band that came to apprehend him, he shewed, that he could as easily have struck them all dead upon the spot^p: and, in liberating his Disciples, he shewed that he could with equal ease, if it had pleased him, have liberated himself also^q. He himself tells us, that, if it had pleased him, he might have had "more than twelve legions of angels" to deliver him^r. But "having loved his own, he loved them to the end;" and drew not back, till, by his own obedience unto death, he had "made an end of sin, and brought in an everlasting righteousness^s." How "passing the knowledge, whether of men or angels, was this unutterable, incomprehensible love!" Seek, my dear Brethren, so far as your feeble capacities will enable you, to comprehend it; that so, being transported with the view of it, "ye may be filled with all the fulness of God^t."]]

^k John xix. 30.

^l Matt. xvi. 21—23.

^m Heb. xii. 2.

ⁿ Isai. liii. 11.

^o Mark x. 32—34.

^p John xviii. 4—6.

^q John xviii. 7—9.

^r Matt. xxvi. 53, 54.

^s Dan. ix. 24.

^t Eph. iii. 18, 19.

2. How willingly, if occasion require, we should suffer to any extent for him!

[We, his followers, must expect to be conformed to him^u; “drinking of the cup which he drank of, and being baptized with the baptism that he was baptized with^x.” But shall we account this a hard matter? Has he endured so much for us, and shall we be averse to suffer for him? Shall we not rather “rejoice that we are counted worthy” of such an honour^y, and bless our God for conferring it upon us^z? Be prepared then, every one of you, for that “fire” and that “sword” which he has taught you to expect^a: and, to whatever extremities ye may be reduced, be ever ready to “follow him without the camp, bearing his reproach^b.”]

^u Matt. x. 24, 25. ^x Mark x. 38, 39. ^y Acts v. 41.

^z 1 Pet. iv. 12—14. ^a Matt. x. 34—39. ^b Heb. xiii. 12, 13.

MDXXXII.

JUDGING WHAT IS RIGHT.

Luke xii. 57. *Why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?*

IT appears truly wonderful, that any who beheld the miracles of our blessed Lord should be able to resist the evidence which they afforded of his being the true Messiah. Our Lord appealed to them, that they could judge with some degree of certainty about the weather: if they saw a cloud coming from the west (the Mediterranean Sea), they judged it a prognostic of rain: and if the wind blew from the south (the Arabian Desert), they expected that heat would ensue: and in these things their expectations were, for the most part, realized. Yet, though “they could thus discern, with some degree of precision, the face of the sky and of the earth, they could not discern the signs of that time^a;” which were so clear, that it was scarcely possible to mistake them. Hence he reproved them, in the expostulation before us, “Why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?”

Let me, from these words,

^a ver. 54—56.

I. Shew that man, though of himself he cannot find what is right, can yet form a good judgment of what is right, when once it is fairly proposed for his consideration—

[Man, doubtless, could not of himself devise a way in which he might obtain reconciliation with God. This it was not within the reach of any finite capacity to conceive — — — Nor could he tell how to render acceptable service to his God. The nature and extent of perfect holiness were far beyond the utmost stretch of his imagination — — —

But when God had revealed a way of salvation for man through the mediation of his only-begotten Son, and through the operation of his blessed Spirit, man, though he could not *comprehend* such a mystery, must say at once, ‘This, if true, is worthy of God, and fully adequate to the necessities of man:’ and the more deeply he considered it, the more fully would this conviction flash upon his mind. He would say, ‘I can never atone for one sin; but here is a sufficient atonement for the sins of the whole world. I can never work out a righteousness wherein to appear before God; but here, in the obedience of my incarnate God, I see a perfect righteousness, clothed in which, I may stand before God without spot or blemish. I can never restore to my soul that likeness to God, in which it was at first created; but the Holy Spirit, the Third Person in the ever-blessed Trinity, is able to effect it, and to transform me into the Divine image in righteousness and true holiness. I see then, that, supposing this revelation to be from God, there is in the salvation there proposed, a suitableness, and a sufficiency, that commends it to my judgment, and must for ever endear it to my soul.’

In answer to this, that affirmation of Scripture may be adduced, “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned^b.” But this is not owing to his incapacity to judge, provided he would judge with candour; but to his prejudices and passions, which pervert his judgment: for, of those who believe not, it is said, “The god of this world hath blinded their eyes, through the instrumentality of their own prejudices and passions, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them^c.” Hence the rejection of the Gospel is always represented as aggravating the guilt of persons, “who would have had, comparatively, no sin, if they had not heard it^d.” And hence was that solemn warning given, “This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world; and men loved

^b 1 Cor. ii. 14.

^c 2 Cor. iv. 4.

^d John xv. 22.

darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil^e." Light would commend itself to men, if they would but open their eyes to behold it: but they choose to shut their eyes, and therefore are fully responsible for the incapacity which they wantonly and perversely bring upon themselves.]

This point being proved, I will now,

II. Address to you the expostulation which is founded on that hypothesis—

“Why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right,”

1. In reference to the sentiments ye shall embrace?

[You have heard, times without number, the mystery of redemption set before you: and you are no strangers to the absurd ways of salvation proposed by an ignorant and ungodly world. And can you halt between these two opinions? Can you see in man's righteousness any thing that can be compared with Christ's perfect righteousness, so as to doubt on which you shall rely for acceptance with God? Compare the two ways of salvation with the Scriptures of truth: Can you doubt which of the two is revealed there? which of the two appears more suited to the justice and holiness of God? which more suited to the necessities of fallen man? “Why of yourselves judge ye not what is right?” Is it any thing short of madness to reject that which God the Father has devised, and God the Son has wrought, and God the Holy Spirit has revealed; and to rest satisfied with the unauthorized surmises of short-sighted man? — — —]

2. In reference to the conduct ye shall pursue?

[You are taught to “give up yourselves as living sacrifices to your God,” and to aspire after “perfection” both of heart and life^f. On the other hand, the world tells you, that this is all enthusiasm, and that “a mere form of godliness” will suffice. Well: Are ye at a loss to judge which is the better way? Let any one tell you, that you may win a race, or gain a victory, by sitting still; or that, if you take one step forward daily and another backward, you will as certainly arrive at your journey's end, as if you were pressing forward daily without any intermission: you would find no difficulty in forming a judgment on those subjects. How, then, can you, for a moment, suppose lukewarmness to be the proper frame of a Christian? or that, whilst indulging it, you have any prospect of bearing off the prize of victory, even eternal life? If you can entertain no doubt of what is required for the attainment of temporal things, how can you hesitate in relation to heavenly things? But turn to the Scriptures: see what they prescribe. See what was the

^e John iii. 19.

^f 2 Cor. xiii. 9

course of the holy men of old, Prophets, Apostles, and the primitive saints: or think what you will wish you had done, the very moment you open your eyes in the eternal world. Judge thus; and you cannot hesitate to declare which is right; the advice that urges you to “give yourselves *wholly* to these things,” or that which teaches you to be satisfied with outward forms and partial attainments — — —]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who exercise no judgment at all—

[You will bitterly regret this supineness at last — — —]

2. Those who act not in accordance with their judgment—

[Your guilt is still more aggravated. “The man who knew his lord’s will, and did it not, will be beaten with many stripes.” Better would it have been for you never to have heard the Gospel at all. The condemnation of Sodom and Gomorrha will be less severe than yours — — —]

MDXXXIII.

REPENTANCE.

Luke xiii. 5. *Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.*

TWICE are these words repeated by our Lord within the space of three verses. And wherefore are they so repeated? Our Lord intended to check that common propensity which we all have to judge others; and to lead us rather to judge ourselves, and to prepare for that awful judgment which shall ere long be passed upon ourselves. Some of his hearers, taking occasion from what he had just spoken, respecting the danger of persons delaying to seek reconciliation with God till they were hurried unprepared into his presence, told him of the Galileans, who had been slain by Pilate in the very act of offering their sacrifices, and whose blood had been thereby mingled with their sacrifices. Our Lord, seeing that they intended to insinuate that this calamity was a judgment from God on account of some enormous wickedness, rectified their error, and taught them to look to themselves instead of judging and condemning others. Such calamities as these, he observed, fell indiscriminately on the righteous and the wicked: but there was a

day coming when a just discrimination would be made, and the impenitent would be subjected to God's heaviest judgments.

After seeing what stress our blessed Lord laid upon these truths, we cannot be thought uncharitable if we open them to you according to their true import. In order to this we will point out,

I. The nature of repentance—

All are ready to imagine that they know what repentance is; though, in truth, very few have any just notions respecting it. It consists in,

1. A humiliation before God on account of sin—

[Though this will not be disputed, few are aware what kind of humiliation is required.

It must be *deep*. It is not a slight superficial sorrow that will suffice. Sin is a dreadful evil, and must be lamented in a way suited to its enormity. Hear in what manner God himself teaches us to deplore the commission of it: "Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy into heaviness: *humble* yourselves under the mighty hand of God^a." Such was the compunction felt by the three thousand on the day of Pentecost^b: such also was the overwhelming sense of guilt which David felt^c: and such in every view was the contrition of Ezra, when he confessed before God his own and his people's iniquities^d. This is the humiliation which God requires; and every thing that falls short of this will he despise^e.

It must be *ingenuous*. There is a sorrow, like that of Felix or of Judas, arising from convictions of the natural conscience, and ending in despair. But this is in no respect acceptable to God; for it will consist with a love of sin, and a hatred of God's law; and the person who is impressed with it would prefer a life of sin, provided only he might be assured of escaping the punishment attendant on it. Our sorrow should resemble that of the Corinthian Church, when they had seen their error, and were humbled for it, with "a sorrow which wrought in them a repentance not to be repented of:" "For behold," says the Apostle, "this self-same thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to

^a Jam. iv. 8—10. ^b Acts ii. 37. ^c Ps. xxxviii. 4. and li. 3.

^d Ezra ix. 5, 6. ^e Ps. li. 17.

be clear in this matter^f." In them we behold what we consider as eminently characterizing true repentance, namely, an ingenuous shame on account of their past conduct, a readiness to justify God in any judgments he should inflict on them, a hatred of their sin, and a determination through grace to walk more circumspectly in future: and wherever such an experience is, there is the grace of God in truth^g.

It must be *abiding*. Transient emotions, of whatever kind they be, can never be regarded as constituting true repentance. Pharaoh's confessions^h, and Saul'sⁱ, appeared to indicate a change of heart: but no real change was wrought in them, as is evident from their reverting almost immediately again to their former ways. The generality, if they had attained the humiliation of Ahab, would be ready to account themselves real penitents: but his subsequent conduct shewed the insincerity of all his professions^k. Far different from this must our contrition be, if ever we would be accepted of our God: we must retain the impressions which have been made upon us: we must say with Hezekiah, "I will go softly all my years in the bitterness of my soul!" and, instead of accounting our acceptance with God a reason for putting off this frame of mind, we should regard it rather as a motive to still deeper humiliation. This is the design of God in exercising mercy towards us^m; and it is the inseparable effect, where that mercy is received arightⁿ.]

2. A turning to God in newness of life—

[This also will be acknowledged as essential to true repentance. But let not this change be mistaken:

It must be *cordial*; not the service of a slave under the influence of fear and dread, but the result of a conviction that sin is an intolerable bondage, and that the service of God is perfect freedom. Whatever change proceeds not from the heart, is mere hypocrisy^o; that which characterizes sound conversion, engages all the faculties of the soul^p. Thus it is represented by Solomon in his intercessory prayer^q: and agreeable to their representation is the direction given to us by the prophet Joel: "Turn ye even to me *with all your heart*, with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning^r."

It must be *progressive*. Conversion is not a work that is accomplished all at once, or ever so perfect in this life, but that

^f 2 Cor. vii. 10, 11. ^g Ezek. xx. 43, 44.

^h Exod. ix. 27. and x. 16, 17.

ⁱ 1 Sam. xxiv. 16—18. and xxvi. 21.

^k 1 Kings xxi. 27—29. and xxii. 27.

^l Isai. xxxviii. 15.

^m Rom. ii. 4.

ⁿ Ezek. xvi. 63.

^o Jer. iii. 10.

^p Jer. xxiv. 7.

^q 2 Chron. vi. 37, 38.

^r Joel ii. 12.

we need to be pressing forward for higher attainments. Even Paul himself, towards the close of his life, did “not consider himself as having attained perfection, or apprehended all for which he had himself been apprehended of Christ Jesus; and hence he, like a person in a race, forgot all that was behind, and reached forward for that which was before^s.” As the body, though perfect in its parts even in the earliest infancy, grows in every part till it arrives at manhood; so does the new man advance toward “the full measure of the stature of Christ^t.” We should “grow in grace;” and so grow as to make our “profiting to appear.” We may not indeed be able to see any actual advance at very short intervals, any more than we can see the advance of the sun every minute: but yet we perceive after a time that the sun has proceeded in its course; and in like manner must our path be like the shining light, which “shineth more and more unto the perfect day.” We must be “going on unto perfection,” and aspire after that which is proposed to us as the proper object of our ambition; namely, “to stand perfect and complete in all the will of God^u.”

It must be *uniform*. Nothing under heaven is to divert us from our duty. We are not ever to be influenced by times or circumstances, so as to decline a positive duty through fear of man, or to commit a positive evil for the sake of any earthly advantage. The changes which we see in the conduct of St. Paul, did not proceed from any *deviation from principle*, but from a strict *adherence to principle*. His one object was to save the souls of men: and in things that were non-essential, he accommodated himself to their habits and prejudices, in order to promote his main design: but when he saw that any evil was likely to arise from a particular act of conformity, he was as immovable as a rock. Thus we may vary our conduct on particular occasions, provided we can appeal to God that we are actuated by a regard for the welfare of others, and not by any personal considerations of our own. But in no instance whatever must this principle be extended so far as to violate any known duty or the dictates of our own conscience: life itself must be of no value in our eyes in comparison of God’s honour, and the preservation of a conscience void of offence towards God and man.

It must be *unreserved*. Not only must we labour to undo what we have done amiss, by making restitution of ill-gotten gain, and warning those whom we have led into sin, but we must strive to mortify sin of every kind in every degree. Every man has some “sin that more easily besets him,” and to which he will be more strongly tempted. This sin is different in different persons; in one, pride; in another, passion: in

^s Phil. iii. 12—14.

^t Eph. iv. 13.

^u Col. iv. 12.

another, lust; in another, covetousness; in another, ambition and the love of praise: in another, sloth; but, whatever it be, our victory over it is a just criterion of our state: if it lead us captive, we are yet carnal and unrenewed: whatever repentance we may fancy ourselves to have experienced, it has all been ineffectual; we are yet in our sins; we are “in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity.” A right eye must be plucked out, if it cause us to offend, and a right hand must be amputated: no alternative remains to us, but to part with that, or to suffer the miseries of hell^x.

Such is the view which God himself gives us of repentance; and to this alone does he annex any hope of salvation: “Repent, and turn yourselves from *all* your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin^y.”]

These views of repentance will appear in all their importance, if we consider,

II. The necessity of it—

The word which we translate ‘likewise,’ may possibly be intended to mark a resemblance between the calamities that awaited the impenitent Jews, and those which had befallen the persons just spoken of^z. But, as we are more interested in what relates to ourselves, we shall rather take a general view of the subject, than attempt a parallel, which would be more curious than useful. We say then, in reference to repentance, that the necessity for it is,

1. Indispensable—

[On this, eternal happiness and eternal misery depend; “except we repent, we must all perish.” It is not for us to say what God *might* do: it is sufficient to know what he *will* do. He has appointed repentance, as the means of obtaining reconciliation with him: and he has given his own Son to die for us, in order that, the guilt of sin having been expiated by the blood of the cross, he may be able to receive returning sinners in a perfect consistency with the demands of law and justice. Let this matter be clearly understood. He has not appointed repentance to atone for sin; for if we could shed rivers of tears, they never could wash away the smallest sin: it is the blood of Christ only, that can cleanse from sin: no other fountain ever was, or ever can be, opened for sin and for uncleanness, but that which issued from the wounds of our adorable Redeemer. But repentance is necessary in order to prepare

^x Mark ix. 43—48.

^y Ezek. xviii. 30.

^z In ver. 3. it is ὁσαύτως, and in the text ὁμοίως.

our souls for a worthy reception of the Divine mercies, and for a suitable improvement of them. Though therefore it cannot atone for sin, or merit any thing at the hands of God, it is indispensably necessary; and, if we do not repent, we must for ever remain in the snare of the devil, and the gates of heaven will assuredly be closed against us^a. The declaration in our text will certainly be fulfilled: and sooner shall heaven and earth pass away, than one jot or tittle of it ever fail. Know ye then, that whatever is implied in the “*perishing*” of an immortal soul, must be the portion of every impenitent sinner — — —]

2. Universal—

[There are authors, of no mean name, who have endeavoured to prove that there are some who need not to repent. Because our Lord says, “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance;” and, that “there is more joy among the angels over one sinner that repenteth, than over ninety and nine just persons who need no repentance;” they imagine, there is a class of persons whose natures are so pure, and their conduct so blameless, as not to have given any occasion for repentance. But the former of these passages relates to those who thought themselves righteous, and who, from a conceit of their being “whole,” despised the proffered aid of a physician^b: the latter evidently refers to those who have already been converted to God, and are as sheep living in the fold of Christ. Such persons are considered as secure, whilst those who are unconverted are in most imminent danger: and, as the recovery of a lost sheep affords more sensible pleasure to its owner, than the possession of a hundred that have not strayed; so the angels are filled with pre-eminent joy at the conversion of one, whom they had considered as in a lost and perishing condition^c. That these passages cannot be understood as sanctioning the idea that there are any persons so good as not to need repentance, must be evident to every one who considers what the Scriptures elsewhere speak respecting the universal state of man. St. Paul collects a multitude of texts, to prove that “there is none righteous, no not one: that all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God: and that therefore every mouth must be stopped, and all the world become guilty before

^a 2 Tim. ii. 25, 26.

^b See Matt. ix. 12, 13. It might be interpreted of those who were renewed and made righteous by the Holy Spirit. But the former sense is more agreeable to the context.

^c See Luke xv. 7. If this be interpreted as though it referred to sheep that have never strayed, it must then mean that they have not strayed *to such an extent* as others. But the other interpretation is far preferable.

God^d.” “There is not a man that liveth and sinneth not,” says Solomon. “In many things we offend all,” says St. James. “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves,” says St. John, “and the truth is not in us.” But where shall we find these persons who need no repentance? Will the advocates for this strange opinion venture to point out a person that possesses this high attainment? If they did, the person himself, unless peculiarly blinded by the devil, would contradict their testimony. But we will suppose this paragon of excellence produced: is he more righteous than Job, of whom God himself testified, that “there was none like him in the earth, a perfect and upright man, one that feared God and eschewed evil^e?” For argument sake, we will suppose him equal to Job: would he then not need to repent? Hear what Job says of himself; “If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me: if I say, I am perfect, it shall also prove me perverse. Though I were perfect, yet would I not know my soul: I would despise my life. If I wash myself with snow-water, and make my hands never so clean, yet shalt thou plunge me in the ditch, and mine own clothes shall abhor me^f.” Let those then who will maintain such an unscriptural sentiment lay to heart that warning of the Almighty, “Thou sayest, Because I am innocent, surely his anger shall turn from me: behold, I will plead with thee, because thou sayest, I have not sinned^g.” If they will not humble themselves now, let them prepare to maintain their own cause against God in the day of judgment.

We say then that the necessity of repentance is universal: and we entreat every one to apply the declaration to his own soul, “Except ye repent, ye shall ALL likewise perish.”]

ADDRESS—

1. To those who think themselves penitents—

[What has been spoken on the nature of repentance, may well lead us to examine ourselves, and to fear lest we should deceive our own souls. We entreat you all therefore to bear in mind the particulars which you have heard, and to try yourselves by them. If in any thing we appear to have pressed the point too far, let *the confession* which we always utter *at the Lord's supper*, be taken in connexion with it; and it will be found that we have not uttered a single sentiment which is not contained in that formulary.

And here we cannot but entreat all who are in the habit of frequenting the Lord's table to inquire, whether their repentance be such as, in that prayer, they profess it to be. We are told by our Church what is required of them that come to

^d Rom. iii. 9—19.

^e Job. i. 8.

^f Job ix. 20, 21, 30, 31.

^g Jer. ii. 35.

the Lord's supper, namely, To examine themselves whether they repent them *truly* of their former sins. This examination we now most earnestly recommend; lest *in the midst of all* "your sacrifices" the wrath of God break forth against you and you "perish" in a far more fearful manner than ever the "Galileans" did^h.]

2. To those who desire to repent—

[Delay not one moment to execute your purpose, lest death find you unprepared to meet your God. Knowing the terrors of the Lord, we would "persuade" you so to turn to him that you may have no reason to dread them. Yet remember not to address yourselves to the work of repentance in your own strength: for it is God alone who can give it you; and he has "exalted the Lord Jesus to his own right hand on purpose to give you repentance and remission of sinsⁱ." If you are tempted to doubt whether he will bestow it upon *you*, know that "he is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance^k." In proof of that, we need only consider what is implied in the words of our text. When it is said, that "except we repent we shall all perish," we may fairly take the converse of it to be true, and conclude, that they who do repent shall not perish. O blessed truth, confirmed by thousands of positive declarations! Not to insist on that instructive parable of the Prodigal Son (which yet may be a source of comfort to every contrite soul); let that representation of God's love to penitents, which is given us by the prophet Jeremiah, be duly considered, and you will need no other encouragement to turn unto God with your whole hearts^l. Behold, then, our parting exhortation to every one amongst you is, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon^m."]

^h ver. 1.

ⁱ Acts v. 31.

^k 2 Pet. iii. 9.

^l Jer. xxxi. 18—20.

^m Isai. lv. 7.

MDXXXIV.

THE BARREN FIG-TREE.

Luke xiii. 7—9. *Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: and if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.*

PERSONS, who can least bear a scrutiny themselves, are apt to pass the severest censures upon others. But we can never form a just estimate of men's characters from the dispensations of Providence towards them; nor, though our conclusions were more certain, would it become us to place ourselves on the seat of judgment: we are far more concerned to prepare for the account which we ourselves must render unto God. Such was the advice which our Lord gave to his censorious hearers: he bade them repent of their own sins instead of presuming to judge others^a, and enforced his admonition with an apposite and instructive parable. We shall inquire,

I. In what respects we resemble a barren fig-tree ?

Humiliating as the comparison before us is, it is but too just. We have enjoyed every advantage that could conduce to fruitfulness—

[The fig-tree is represented as planted in a vineyard where the soil was good, and every attention was paid to it. Thus we have not been left in the open field of the heathen world: we have been planted in the enclosed vineyard of God's Church. His word and ordinances have been regularly administered to us: we have participated both the stated and occasional labours of his ministers; nor has any thing been wanting which could render us fruitful. God may appeal respecting us, as he did respecting his Church of old: "What could I have done more for them than I have done^b?"]

Yet notwithstanding all our advantages, we have hitherto been found barren—

[For three successive years was the fig-tree destitute of fruit: and have not we been barren a much longer time? The fruits which God expects are repentance, faith, and obedience^c: but have we mourned over our sins with deep contrition? — — — Have we fled to Christ as the only refuge and hope of lost sinners? — — — Have we presented ourselves to him a holy and living sacrifice? — — — Has it been the labour and ambition of our souls to abound in these fruits? Have we not even to this hour been "barren and unfruitful in the knowledge of Christ?" Have we not rather, as cumberers of the ground, been prejudicial to those around us? Have not those who

^a ver. 1—5.

^b Isai. v. 4.

^c Matt. iii. 8. Luke xviii. 8. and Phil. i. 11.

have been planted near us, reason to complain that they have been retarded by us, rather than furthered, in the spiritual life? Surely too many of us deserve the name once given to Israel of old^d; “Israel is an empty vine, (a barren fig-tree,) that bringeth forth fruit to itself alone, and none at all to God.”]

We may justly wonder therefore that we are suffered to occupy our respective places, and inquire,

II. Whence it is that, notwithstanding our unfruitfulness, we have been spared to this time?

We are not spared because our state is inoffensive to God—

[The owner of the vineyard noticed all the pains bestowed on the fig-tree, and felt his disappointment greater every successive year: hence he spake of its unfruitfulness with astonishment and indignation^e. And must not the heavenly vine-dresser wonder, that in the midst of so many advantages *we* remain unfruitful? And has he not declared that unprofitable servants are objects of his utter abhorrence^f.]

Much less are we spared because we are better than others—

[Doubtless there are degrees of sinfulness and guilt: as among men, so in the sight of God, there are some worse than others. But what good can be in him who answers no one end of his creation? The description given of such persons by the prophet is strictly just^g. (There is scarcely any thing in the creation so worthless as the wood of a barren vine.) And to them may be addressed those humiliating words of Moses; “Not for your sakes have these mercies been vouchsafed to you; for ye are a stiff-necked people^h.”]

The intercession of Christ is the true reason of God’s forbearance towards us—

[The fig-tree was spared only at the request of “the vine-dresser.” The order given would certainly have been executed, if he had not obtained a respite: and little do we think how often death has had a commission to cut *us* down. Surely our continued provocations must often have incensed our God against us: but, as in former times, he often revoked his word at the urgent request of his servant Moses;ⁱ so beyond a doubt has the Psalmist’s declaration been often verified in our great

^d Hos. x. 1.

^e “*Behold—Why,*” &c. convey these ideas very forcibly.

^f Matt. xxv. 26, 30.

^g Ezek. xv. 2—4.

^h Deut. ix. 4—6.

ⁱ Exod. xxxii. 10, 11, 14.

Advocate and Intercessor, "He has stood in the gap, to turn away God's indignation, lest he should destroy us^k."]

The respite however which is yet prolonged, will not last for ever. Know therefore,

III. What doom we must expect if we still continue barren—

God will deal with every man according to his works. If now at last we begin to bear fruit it will be well—

[The vine-dresser undertook to bestow still greater culture on the fig-tree, and intimated that, if his labours should succeed, it would be a source of much satisfaction to him. But how much more is this true in reference to our souls! At this moment we may consider the trench digging, and the manure applied to us. And what a source of comfort will it be, if these means be blessed with success! The owner of the vineyard, the dresser of it, yea, and the inferior labourers too, will greatly rejoice^l. And what a blessing will it be to the tree itself! Instead of being cut down as useless, we shall be an ornament to the vineyard; nor will God himself disdain to regale himself with our fruit^m. In due season, too, we shall be transplanted to that richer vineyard above, and bring forth fruit to God's glory for evermore. Yes, our past unfruitfulness should be no obstruction to our bliss; but joy and honour shall be our everlasting portion.]

But if the culture be still in vain, we must be speedily cut down—

[The intercessor himself approved of this in reference to the fig-tree: and can any thing else be expected by those whom the Gospel does not profit? Can any think that they shall be left to cumber the ground for ever? Must not even the patience of God himself be at last exhausted? Shall He not ere long definitively say, CUT THEM DOWN? Must we not *then* be consigned over to everlasting burnings? And must not our Intercessor, yea, our own souls also, approve the sentence? Let every one then attend to the warning given to the antediluvian world, "My Spirit shall not alway strive with manⁿ:" and let not one amongst us defer till the morrow, what, if left undone, must involve him in everlasting ruin.]

INFER—

1. How thankful should we be to our great Advocate and Intercessor!

^k Ps. cvi. 23.

^l Luke xv. 5—7, 10.

^m Cant. iv. 16.

ⁿ Gen. vi. 3.

[Many since the last year have been cut off by death. What a mercy should we esteem it that *we* have been spared! How dreadful must our state have now been if we had been taken unprepared! We should have been irrevocably doomed to dwell with the fallen angels; nor should we ever have heard one more offer of mercy from our offended God. Let us then bless and adore our Lord for this distinguishing favour; and let his love constrain us to turn unto him with our whole hearts^o.]

2. How earnest should we be in improving the present moment!

[Many are dead who lately seemed as likely to live as ourselves: but, when their time was come, they could not resist the stroke of death; nor can any who are now alive, tell how long a respite shall be granted them. It is probable that many of us will be gone before the expiration of this year^p; and whenever the fixed period shall arrive, all intercessions will be in vain. Let us then redeem the time with all earnestness and zeal, and accomplish the great work, before the night cometh to terminate our labours.]

^o 2 Pet. i. 5—8.

^p Perhaps one in thirty or forty.

MDXXXV.

THE INFIRM WOMAN CURED.

Luke xiii. 15, 16. *The Lord then answered him, and said, Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering? And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath-day?*

THE command to sanctify the Sabbath was given to man in Paradise, and was perpetuated to all generations when it was engraven on stones by God himself, together with the other precepts of the law. But the sanctification of that day consists, not in a mere abstinence from bodily labour, but in a suspension of all temporal cares, and an application of soul to spiritual duties. This appears from the conduct of our Lord himself: he never was more active than on the Sabbath-day; and when censured by superstitious hypocrites, he vindicated himself by shewing that works of necessity and mercy were perfectly

compatible with that holy rest which God had enjoined. To this effect he spake in the passage before us; in discoursing upon which, we shall consider,

I. The miracle he wrought—

There was in the synagogue a woman much afflicted in body—

[By the force of some disorder her whole frame was so contracted or relaxed, that she was utterly incapable of standing upright. This disorder had been, in some way or other, inflicted on her by Satan. The same wicked spirit who smote Job with boils, and possessed the bodies of many in our Saviour's days, had exerted his power over her; and she had been no less than eighteen years in this deplorable condition; yet as she was not ashamed to go to the synagogue on account of her deformity, so neither would she be detained from it by her weakness. Alas! how many amongst us absent themselves from the house of God under far less plausible pretexts, notwithstanding our ordinances are so incomparably superior to those which she was privileged to attend.]

Our Lord, well knowing her case, afforded her a miraculous relief—

[He needed not to have his compassion moved by earnest entreaties. Unsolicited he called her to him, and by the imposition of his hand conveyed an instantaneous cure. Thus he shewed how easily he could “destroy the works of the devil^a,” and that neither length of time nor inveteracy of disorder could at all obstruct the efficacy of his word.]

The censure which he incurred on account of this benevolent act, called forth,

II. His vindication of it—

The Ruler of the synagogue expressed his indignation at this exercise of power—

[That which in reality hurt his feelings was, the popularity of Jesus. He could not endure to see him followed by such multitudes, and confirming his divine mission by such miracles. But, because he could not with the smallest appearance of reason condemn the miracle he had seen, he pretended to be offended at its being wrought on the Sabbath-day. He proceeded to reprove the people for paying so little regard to that holy day; and thus obliquely cast reflections on our Lord himself. What an evidence of his enmity against Christ, and

^a 1 John iii. 8.

of his being altogether destitute of compassion to his fellow-creatures! And how thin the veil under which he endeavoured to cover these detestable qualities!]

Our Lord, however, vindicated his own conduct in a most unanswerable manner—

[He tacitly acknowledged the necessity of sanctifying the Sabbath; but appealed to his hearers, whether such a work as he had performed were any breach of it. If *they* universally considered themselves at liberty to loose an ox or an ass from the stall in order to give it water on the Sabbath-day, how much more justifiable was *he* in loosing the *far sorer bands* of a *rational being*, yea, of a *daughter of Abraham*, on that day; more especially, *when it was Satan himself who had bound her*; when she too had been no less than *eighteen years* in that state; and when he had effected her cure simply by a touch of his hand. Such was our Lord's argument; and it flashed conviction upon every mind. Thus, while the ruler's hypocrisy was detected, and the adversaries, who had sided with him, were put to shame, our Saviour's character rose in the estimation of all the people.]

And this speaks loudly to us, if we will attentively consider,

III. The reflections suggested by it—

1. What blindness and hypocrisy are there in the human heart!

[Every one sees in an instant how deservedly our Lord reproached the Ruler for his hypocrisy; and we are ready to suppose that *we* should never have indulged so vile a disposition. But there is nothing more common than the very spirit which he manifested. He condemned people for seeking the healing of their bodies on the *Sabbath-day*. And are there none who are offended at men for seeking the salvation of their souls on the *week-day*? I know that *these* will plead a regard for order, and for the institutions of man; but the Ruler had a still stronger plea, namely, a regard for the Sabbath, and the express commandments of God. Yet, whatever they may think, neither the one nor the other are upright before God. The objections of both originate in the same evil disposition, a want of regard for the Saviour's honour and for the welfare of their fellow-creatures. On this account the Judge of quick and dead called *him* a hypocrite. By what name I pray you will he call *these*, when they shall stand before him at his tribunal? Is not the soul of as much value as the body? and are we not as much justified in promoting its welfare on a week-day, or on the Sabbath evening, as a diseased person is in seeking relief for the body upon the

Sabbath-day? Let us all then acknowledge the evil of our own hearts; and give God the glory if we be in any measure freed from the prejudices by which so many in every age and place are blinded.]

2. How desirable is it to embrace every opportunity of waiting upon God!

[The woman broke through every difficulty that she might honour the public institutions of religion. And was she not well repaid for her trouble at last? Surely the restoration of her body to health and strength was a blessing that would have abundantly compensated for still greater toil than she ever endured. And have none amongst us received a still richer recompence? If your bodily disorders have not been removed, have you never received grace both to bear and improve them? Have none of you been delivered from the bonds in which Satan held your souls? Has not your guilt been removed, and the corruption of your hearts been in some measure healed? Let this encourage all to wait upon God. Let it make you fearful of yielding to any excuses, lest you be absent from the ordinances at the very time that Jesus shall manifest his presence there: worldly business, worldly pleasure, dinner company, and such like engagements, will ill repay you for the loss of spiritual and eternal good. Say not, 'I can serve God as well at home;' for it is not the means we use, but the blessing of God upon them that renders them effectual to our benefit; and God's blessing cannot be expected, if we seek it not in the way of his appointment. And if proud and envious hypocrites condemn you, regard it not. Your Saviour himself will vindicate your conduct, to your honour, and to their confusion.]

3. With what comfortable hope may we look to Jesus under all our troubles!

[It is alike easy to him to save from bodily or spiritual disorders. A touch of his hand, or word of his mouth, will convey the blessing we desire. Are we then labouring under any affliction of mind or body? Are we, like David, "bowed down greatly, and do we go mourning all the day long^b?" Behold, it is the Saviour's office to bind up that which is broken, to heal that which is sick, and to raise up them that are bowed down^c. Nor can we doubt but that he, who *prevented* the application of this afflicted woman, will come at our entreaty, and impart the aid which we implore. Let us all, then, direct our eyes unto him, and may we all become monuments of his power and grace, for his mercy's sake! Amen.]

^b Ps. xxxviii. 6.

^c Isai. lxi. 1. Ps. cxlvi. 8.

MDXXXVI.

THE LAST FIRST, AND THE FIRST LAST.

Luke xiii. 30. *Behold, there are last which shall be first; and there are first which shall be last.*

THIS is a declaration frequently made by our blessed Lord; and therefore we may be sure it contains some very important truths, that deserve our deepest attention. Persons who are addicted to human systems will put an exceedingly different construction upon these words; some pressing them to an unwarrantable extent; whilst others limit them, so as to enervate and destroy all their force. We, however, desire to treat them, not in a proud and controversial spirit, but in a spirit of humility and love; equally avoiding both extremes, and endeavouring to deduce from them such practical instruction as our Lord himself intended them to convey. With this view, I will,

I. Shew to what an extent they have been realized—

That God acts as a Sovereign in the communication of good, we have no doubt; but not so in the distribution of evil: and therefore, whilst we see in this passage a clear evidence of electing love, we cannot for a moment admit that there is any ground for the doctrine of absolute reprobation. If the last are made first, it is by the grace of God: but if the first are made last, it is altogether by their own fault. This will appear in every part of the subject; whilst I shew, that the truth here conveyed has been realized in all ages, and is yet daily realized amongst men, in whatever light they be viewed. View them,

1. In their national privileges—

[The Jews were God's peculiar people. Never did any nation under heaven enjoy such privileges as they. They, for the space of two thousand years, were "the first" in every thing that related to eternal life. As for the poor benighted Gentiles, they were left in darkness and the shadow of death, given over to follow their own evil ways, and to be led captive

by the devil at his will. But in the apostolic age the case was altogether changed; the Jews being cast off from God; and the Gentiles being admitted into covenant with him, and made partakers of far higher privileges than were ever accorded to the Jews. There is, in fact, scarcely any comparison between the mercies vouchsafed to us, and those of which God's ancient people partook: so true is it, that "we, who once were last, are now first; and the Jews, who were once first, are last." In fact, that is now fulfilled which our blessed Lord foretold, that multitudes now "come to him from every quarter of the globe, to sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven; whilst the children of the kingdom, the poor infatuated Jews, are cast into outer darkness, where is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth^a."

2. In their civil station—

[The rich and great and noble appear to have immense advantages for heaven, because they can employ a great portion of their time in heavenly pursuits; whilst the poor, who are necessitated to earn their bread by some earthly occupation, have but little time to spare for the acquisition of divine knowledge. But "the rich, for the most part, are too wise in their own conceit^b" to suspect their own ignorance, or to submit to divine teaching; and they have such a fulness and sufficiency of earthly gratifications, that they are not disposed to seek after happiness in things above. The poor, on the contrary, are more willing to receive instruction, and to listen to advice in relation to spiritual and eternal riches. This has been the case in all ages. In our Lord's day, it was said, "Have any of the Rulers and of the Pharisees believed on him?" But "the common people heard him gladly." In like manner, St. Paul says of those in his day, "Not many mighty, not many noble, are called." And in every age, St. James informs us, "God hath chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith, and heirs of his kingdom^c."

3. In their intellectual attainments—

[Certainly knowledge, beyond every thing else, elevates man above his fellows. Yet, when his aspect is viewed in reference to religion, it is frequently found rather hostile, than friendly, to heavenly pursuits. Hence it is said, in a fore-cited passage, that "not many wise men after the flesh are called; but, instead of them, the foolish, the weak, and the base^d." Indeed, God has said, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the

^a Matt. viii. 11, 12.

^c Jam. ii. 5.

^b Prov. xxviii. 11.

^d 1 Cor. i. 26—28.

disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world^e?" The truth is, that the wisdom of this world is so deeply impregnated with pride, that it cannot submit to the humiliating doctrines of the Gospel^f. "The wisdom of God is foolishness with man: and the wisdom of man is foolishness with God^g:" and the only way for any man to become truly wise, is to become a fool in his own estimation, and to receive with child-like simplicity every word that God hath spoken^h. And if any think it hard that such contempt should be poured on human wisdom, let him know that our blessed Saviour saw nothing in it but ground for praise and thanksgiving: "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes; even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sightⁱ."]

4. In their moral habits—

[These, above all, we should suppose to be favourable to the reception of the Gospel. But really experience is far from confirming this sentiment: for the Scribes and Pharisees were externally moral; yet did publicans and harlots enter into the kingdom of heaven before them^k." "The former justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John: whereas the latter rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him^l." And, as the fruit of these different dispositions, the Pharisee, who thought himself righteous, and despised others, went from the Divine presence with all his guilt upon him, whilst the self-condemning Publican was justified from all his sins^m. Where can we find a more impious character than Manasseh? or one more bitter than Saul? or one in a more desperate condition than the dying thief? Yet all these found mercy of the Lord, that "in them, as in the chief of sinners, God might be the more glorifiedⁿ." And thus it frequently is at this day: "where sin has abounded, grace much more abounds; that as sin has reigned unto death, so grace might reign through righteousness unto eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord^o."

Thus, in all these respects, are our Lord's words fully verified; not only the Gentiles occupying a higher station than God's ancient people; but the poor, the illiterate, and the depraved being raised to a participation of God's kingdom and glory, to a far greater extent than the rich, the learned, and the moral: so true is it still, as in former ages, that "God raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar

^e 1 Cor. i. 19, 20.

^f 1 Cor. ii. 14.

^g 1 Cor. i. 21—25.

^h 1 Cor. iii. 18—20.

ⁱ Matt. xi. 25, 26.

^k Matt. xxi. 31.

^l Luke vii. 29, 30.

^m Luke xviii. 10—14.

ⁿ 1 Tim. i. 15, 16.

^o Rom. v. 20, 21.

from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory^p.”]

Having endeavoured to elucidate the words before us, I will now,

II. Suggest the improvement which, in my judgment the subject calls for—

I cannot conceive any subject more calculated,

1. To put down presumption—

[Let any person be as elevated as he will in national privileges, or civil station, or intellectual attainments, or moral habits, yea, I will add also, in religious experience; let him be the admiration of all around him; yet will I say, that if he be lifted up with pride, he will fall into the condemnation of the devil; and, from being the first in human estimation, he will become the last in Divine acceptance. Look at Demas: so eminent was he in the estimation of St. Paul, that twice did the Apostle join him with St. Luke, in his salutations to the saints: “Salute Lucas and Demas.” Yet we find this man at last forsaking the way of godliness, and turning back to a state of utter worldliness and carnality^q. In the book of Job we read of many “whose excellency mounts up to the heavens, and their head reaches to the clouds; and yet, at last, they perish like their own dung; and they who have seen them are led, with a mixture of doubt and lamentation, to say, Where is he^r?” And where shall we find a Church in which such instances have not occurred, to the disgrace of true religion, and to the grief of all who held fast their profession? I say then to every soul of man, however advanced in piety he may appear, “Be not high-minded, but fear.” Yea, though he may have attained the eminence of Paul himself, I will bid him “keep his body under, and bring it into subjection; lest, after having preached to others, he himself should become a cast-away^s.”]

2. To prevent despair—

[Let not any one tell me that his guilt is too great to be forgiven, or his depravity too inveterate to be subdued. I will grant that the disadvantages under which a man may labour may be so great as to render his conversion, in all human appearance, impossible; yet will I say, that though he be the last, yet may he become the first. What cannot HE do, who formed the universe out of nothing, and reduced the chaos to the order and beauty in which we behold it? If only we

^p 1 Sam. ii. 8.

^r Job xx. 6, 7.

^q 2 Tim. iv. 10.

^s 1 Cor. ix. 27.

remember who it is that is engaged in our behalf, we shall never despond. For what is there that God cannot effect? If there ever was any thing to be despaired of, it was, that Jesus should be restored to life after he had been committed to the tomb. But did not “the stone which the builders had disallowed become the head-stone of the corner?” and shall not He who was “crucified through weakness” “put all his enemies under his feet?” Then I say, let no man entertain desponding thoughts, as though he were beyond the reach of mercy: for however “far off we may be from God, we may be brought nigh by the blood of Christ.” Only let us call on Him “who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were;” and let us, “against hope, believe in hope[†],” and, like Abraham, we shall be made “friends of God,” yea, and sit down, at last, with Abraham in the kingdom of our God, for ever and ever.]

[†] Rom. iv. 17, 18.

MDXXXVII.

THE MAN CURED OF THE DROPSY.

Luke xiv. 1—4. *And it came to pass, as he went into the house of one of the chief Pharisees to eat bread on the Sabbath-day, that they watched him. And behold, there was a certain man before him which had the dropsy. And Jesus answering spake unto the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath-day? And they held their peace. And he took him, and healed him, and let him go.*

ALTHOUGH the Gospel requires those who embrace it to become dead to the world, it does not forbid us to maintain occasional and friendly intercourse with unenlightened men. St. Paul rectifies a mistake which had arisen in the Church upon this very subject, and tells us that to renounce *all* connexion with the ungodly, would be to exclude ourselves from the world altogether^a. But peculiar caution is necessary when we are in their company; and the most effectual way of counteracting their pernicious influence is, to labour to do them good. This we may learn from our Lord's own example in

^a 1 Cor. v. 9, 10.

the history before us. He was in a Pharisee's house, whither he had been invited to dinner; and his conduct there will afford us many useful lessons. We shall consider,

I. The character of those who entertained our Lord—

The lawyers and Pharisees professed a high regard for religion, and on this occasion appeared to act a very friendly part. But they soon manifested,

1. Their inveterate malignity—

[Under the mask of friendship they were traitors at heart. They “watched” our Lord's words and actions, not with a desire to receive instruction, but with a determination to seize an opportunity of traducing his character and destroying his life. Such was their employment on the Sabbath-day, when they should have been more particularly in the exercise of all holy affections. Such was their return to our Lord for all his condescension and kindness. And such was their conduct while they wished to be esteemed as patterns of sanctity and virtue. Would to God that this spirit had died with them! But are there none in this day like-minded with them? Do none, who appear friendly in their outward conduct, occupy themselves with watching the words and actions of a godly person, marking any frailty with critical acuteness, and animadverting upon it afterwards with malicious pleasure? Do none even on the Sabbath-day attend the public ministration of the word, with this captious disposition, disdain to receive instruction, and seeking only to find some expressions which they may report and ridicule?]

2. Their utter want of candour—

[Our Lord put a simple question to them, “in answer” to what he knew to be passing in their minds. There was but one answer that could possibly be given to it. But they knew that a just reply would subvert their own superstitious notions, and justify our Lord in a conduct which they wished to condemn. Unable to maintain the sentiments they professed, and unwilling to acknowledge their error, they held their peace. What a base and disingenuous spirit was this! Yet, how many resemble them! If we address the consciences of some, how backward are they to acknowledge the plainest and most unquestionable truths! If they be compelled to give their assent to any position which militates against their practice, they shew, in the very mode of assenting, a fixed determination to resist every inference that may be drawn from their concession. If invited to consider calmly the most important and most obvious truths, they will “shun the light lest their deeds should be

reproved." They have no ears to hear, no eyes to see any thing that condemns themselves; but are all eye, and all ear, when a religious person is to be exposed. Nor is this character found only among the profane; but often among those who affect a great regard for religion, and sometimes even among those, whose office calls them to propagate and defend it^b.]

Difficult as the path of Jesus was hereby rendered, he was enabled to preserve himself unblameable in,

II. His conduct towards them—

In every part of our Lord's demeanour he was a pattern of all perfection. On this occasion in particular we cannot but admire,

1. His wisdom—

[Conscious as he was of the rectitude of his ways, he was nevertheless concerned to obviate the prejudices which subsisted in the minds of others. On this account he put the question respecting the sanctification of the Sabbath, before he proceeded to work the miracle; and again, after he had wrought it, appealed to them respecting their own practice. Thus, though he did not convert, he at least confounded them, and prevented those clamours which they would otherwise have raised against him. Worthy is this example to be followed by all who embrace the Gospel. We cannot extirpate the prejudices of men; but we should blunt the edge of them. We should condescend to reason even on the most obvious truths, and to defend, by argument, the most blameless conduct. We should endeavour to "cut off occasion from those who seek occasion" against us^c. We should "shew out of a good conversation our works with meekness of wisdom^d;" and prevent, as much as possible, "our good from being evil spoken of^e."]]

2. His fortitude—

[When he saw their obstinacy, he was not deterred from doing his Father's will. He would do good, even at the peril of his life, rather than lose the opportunity afforded him. He therefore healed the man of his dropsy, and dismissed him, lest *he* also should be exposed to their murderous rage. Thus should we act, whenever we are opposed in the way of duty. While we labour to disarm our adversaries by a meek and gentle behaviour, we must not fear them. We should say, like Nehemiah, "Shall such a man as I flee?" We should be ready to face any danger and suffer any extremity rather than

^b The lawyers, as well as Pharisees, are mentioned in the text.

^c 2 Cor. xi. 12.

^d Jam. iii. 13.

^e Rom. xiv. 16.

decline from the path which God, in his word or providence, has marked out for us.]

Three CAUTIONS naturally arise from this subject :

1. Let us be on our guard when in the company of the ungodly—

[The more friendly the world appear, the more are we in danger of being ensnared by them. While they continue carnal, they cannot but retain a rooted enmity against spiritual things. Though, therefore, considerations of honour, interest, or consanguinity, may restrain their anger, they will “watch for our halting^f,” they will seek to find some matter of offence in us, that they may seem the more justified in following their own ways^g. Let us then be doubly on our guard when in their company. Let us “keep our lips as with a bridle,” and pray to God to “lead us because of our observers^h.”]

2. Let us study that not even our good may be evil spoken of—

[A thing may be good in itself, and yet be imprudent as to the manner in which it is carried into execution. The primitive Christians were at liberty respecting the eating of meats offered to idols; yet in the use of their liberty they might offend their weaker brethren, and sin against Christ. It is a great part of Christian prudence to discern persons, times, and circumstances, that we may be able to adapt ourselves to the exigencies of the occasion. Let this, then, be our endeavour; let us “walk in wisdom toward them that are without,” and endeavour to “put to silence the ignorance of foolish men by well doingⁱ.”]

3. Let us proceed without fear in the way of duty—

[Daniel and the Hebrew Youths would not conform to the sinful practices of others, notwithstanding they were threatened by the tyrants of their day. Our Lord also was continually opposed by the most malignant adversaries; yet both he and they chose to persist in what was right at the risk of their lives, rather than violate the dictates of their conscience. Thus let us be ready to live or die for God. Let us willingly “endure the contradiction of sinners against ourselves.” Let us put away that “fear of man which bringeth a snare^k,” and continue “steadfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord^l.”]

^f Jer. xx. 10.

^g Ps. xxxv. 19—21, 25.

^h See Ps. v. 8. in the marginal translation. ⁱ 1 Pet. ii. 15.

^k Prov. xxix. 25.

^l 1 Cor. xv. 58.

MDXXXVIII.

THE AMBITIOUS GUEST.

Luke xiv. 7—10. *And he put forth a parable to those which were bidden, when he marked how they chose out the chief rooms; saying unto them, When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room; lest a more honourable man than thou be bidden of him; and he that bade thee and him come and say to thee, Give this man place; and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room. But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee.*

THE Christian is not prohibited from occasionally joining in carnal festivity; but he should carefully watch his own spirit and conduct when he ventures upon such dangerous ground, and should improve his intercourse with worldly company for the spiritual edification of himself and others. Our blessed Lord was sometimes present at feasts; but his conversation at those seasons was always pious and instructive. The things which occurred never failed to furnish him with abundant matter for useful observation. Having noticed at a wedding the indecent ambition of the guests, he animadverted on their conduct in the parable before us—

I. The principle here inculcated—

Our Lord did not intend these words merely as *a maxim* for the regulating of our conduct in one particular, but as *a parable* that should be applied to the whole of our deportment in social life. The scope of the text, whether as originally delivered by Solomon, or as quoted and applied by our Lord, is to recommend humility^a. But to enter fully into its meaning, we must analyse, as it were, the principle here inculcated; which implies,

1. A deep sense of our own unworthiness—

[If we stand high in our own estimation, we cannot but expect a degree of homage from others, and shall be ready to

^a Compare Prov. xxv. 6, 7. with ver. 11.

claim precedence among our equals; but if we have an humiliating sense of our own extreme vileness, we shall readily concede pre-eminence to others, and take the lowest place, as that which properly belongs to us. Such a disposition cannot but spring from self-knowledge; nor can it fail of operating in this manner^b.]

2. An utter contempt of worldly distinctions—

[While we “love that honour which cometh of man,” we cannot but aspire after it, when it comes within our reach. But we are taught to be dead, yea crucified to the world^c; and, this once obtained, we shall despise the baubles that are so much the objects of rivalry and contention.]

3. A readiness to give honour to whom honour is due—

[Though religion teaches us an indifference to man's applause, it does not warrant us to level the established orders of society. God requires us to “honour those that are in authority,” as well as to serve and honour him^d. While therefore a sense of duty will keep us from coveting human distinctions for ourselves, it will induce us cheerfully to pay to others the tribute due to their rank and station.]

Excellent however as this principle is, it needs to be limited by prudence, and exercised with care—

[Though this principle can never operate to too great an extent, it may exert itself in a very absurd manner. There are certain decencies in society that ought not to be violated, as would be the case if the great and noble should literally take the lowest place among those who are of very inferior rank: besides, it is possible that we may be actuated by pride, while we thus put on an appearance of humility. We need therefore take heed both to our hearts and ways, that in obeying this precept we act with sincerity and discretion.]

Having endeavoured to explain the principle, we shall point out,

II. Its importance in human life—

Humility is to the graces of a Christian what holiness is to the attributes of the Deity, the beauty and perfection of them all—

1. It conduces in the highest degree to the comfort of mankind—

[Nothing tends more to *the happiness of our own minds*. What a source of vexation and anguish is pride! With what

^b Phil. ii. 3.

^c Gal. vi. 14.

^d Rom. xiii. 7.

envy are they beheld, to whom precedence has been given! What indignation do they excite, who overlook our superior claims^e! A slight, whether real or supposed, will often fill us with rancour as much as the most serious injury could have done: but let humility possess our minds, and this source of uneasiness is destroyed. If we be willing to give honour to others, and be indifferent to it ourselves, and especially if we count ourselves unworthy of it, we shall feel no pain at seeing others preferred before us.

Nor does any thing more tend to *the peace and comfort of society*. What is it but pride that makes every *neighbourhood* a scene of contention^f? What is it but pride that creates such factions in a *state*? What is it but pride that involves *nations* in war and desolation^g? Even the *Church* of God itself is often torn and distracted by this fatal principle. Let humility once gain a proper ascendant in the hearts of men, and universal harmony will reign. Surely the importance of this principle cannot be too highly rated, or expressed in too energetic terms.]

2. It is that whereby men most eminently adorn the Gospel—

[The avowed scope of the Gospel is to improve the principles and practice of mankind; and they who receive the truth, are expected to excel in every thing that is amiable and praiseworthy. How unseemly did the ambition of the sons of Zebedee appear^h! The ungodly themselves do not hesitate to pronounce them hypocrites who, while they profess religion, are under the dominion of pride and ambition. On the other hand, humility irresistibly commends itself to all. Who does not admire the concessions made by Abraham to his nephew Lotⁱ? Who does not adore the condescension of our Lord in washing his disciples' feet^k? Even those who are most elated with pride themselves, are constrained to applaud humility in others; and though nothing but the grace of God can induce any to embrace the Gospel, a suitable deportment in its professors will often silence the cavils, and disarm the prejudices, of those who ignorantly reject it^l.]

This subject will naturally lead us to CONTEMPLATE,

1. The folly of sin—

[There is really as much *folly*, as there is *sinfulness*, in sin. In how many instances do men attain by integrity and

^e This idea will be fully understood by those who have ever mixed in public assemblies.

^f Jam. iii. 14—16.

^g Jam. iv. 1.

^h Matt. xx. 20—28.

ⁱ Gen. xiii. 9.

^k John xiii. 4, 5.

^l 1 Pet. ii. 13—15.

humility, what others in vain seek for by dishonesty and arrogance! This is well illustrated in the parable before us. Let us then simply endeavour to glorify God by a holy conversation, and leave our temporal advancement to his all-wise disposal.]

2. The excellence of religion—

[Religion does not merely impose rules for our conduct towards God, but should regulate every disposition of our minds, and every action of our lives. Where it has its full influence, it gives a polish which is but poorly mimicked by the refinements of modern politeness: it will not indeed convert a clown into a courtier; but it will teach every one to act as becomes his station. Let us then exhibit in our respective spheres that simplicity of mind and manners, that, while it adorns the Gospel, shall disarm the malice of our enemies, and, if possible, conciliate their esteem^m.]

^m Rom. xii. 10. 1 Pet. v. 5.

MDXXXIX.

LIBERALITY TO THE POOR RECOMMENDED.

Luke xiv. 12—14. *Then said he also to him that bade him, When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbours; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompence be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: and thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.*

IT is a thing yet to be learned in the religious world, that there is no part of Christian duty beneath the attention of those who hear the Gospel, or those who preach it. The Church is a building, which must be carried forward till its final completion. Its foundation must be laid; but in laying it, we must not imagine that it is of any use *of itself*; it is laid, in order to have a superstructure raised upon it; and the builder must advance in his work till he has “brought forth the top-stone.” St. Paul would “not be always laying the foundation of repentance toward God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, but would go on unto perfection.” Thus we would do: and

whatever our blessed Lord inculcated on his Disciples, that would we also inculcate on all who profess to belong to him.

Our Lord, dining at the house of a Pharisee on a Sabbath-day, set himself to correct some evils which he saw peculiarly predominant there. Amongst the company he perceived a spirit of ambition and self-preference; which he endeavoured to correct by a parable suited to the occasion. It should seem, too, that the feast was sumptuous, or, at least, that none but rich people were invited to it: he therefore, to counteract the pride which such a banquet fostered and displayed, told them what kind of feasts he approved; and that, instead of laying out their money in sumptuous entertainments, he would have them rather to spend their money in making provision for the poor. In conformity with this precept, we shall endeavour to set before you some RULES and REASONS *for a proper expenditure of our money.*

I. Some rules—

Two are mentioned in our text;

1. Do not waste your money in giving entertainments to the rich—

[We must not construe this so strictly as to decline all friendly intercourse with our richer relatives or neighbours, or to refuse them the rights of hospitality; for kindness is due to them as well as to the poor, and doubtless may occasionally be exercised towards them in the way *apparently* forbidden in our text. But we must not affect high company, or spend money unnecessarily in entertaining them. Hospitality indeed is good; and we should “love it^a,” and not “be forgetful to entertain strangers; because some have thereby entertained angels unawares^b:” but still this is essentially different from a fondness for parade and feasting; which, however vindicated as necessary to form connexions for one’s children, and to promote social intercourse, and to keep up one’s station in the world, is little else than sensuality and pride. To feast the rich, will involve us in great expense, which of course must lessen our means of doing good to the poor: therefore, though occasions may occur wherein we may not improperly exercise hospitality towards them, we must not find our pleasure in such feasts, nor should

^a 1 Tim. iii. 2. Tit. i. 8. 1 Pet. iv. 9.

^b Heb. xiii. 2.

we devote to them any considerable portion of our income. The generality of persons account the keeping of high company, and the being able to entertain them in a splendid way, as the chief use of wealth; and they launch out into these kinds of expenses the very instant they have received such an accession of fortune as will enable them so to do. But we must shew ourselves of a different spirit, and not sanction by our example any such evil practices.]

2. Devote your property rather to the relieving and comforting of the poor—

[God has ordained that there shall always be poor amongst his people, in order that graces of every kind may be called forth into exercise among them^c. These therefore are to be the special objects of our care; but especially those among them whom God in his providence has visited with afflictions which incapacitate them for labour; “the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind.” The talents which God has committed to our care, are to be laid out with a particular reference to them. Under the law, it was appointed that every person should lay up the tithe of his increase every third year, for the express purpose of feasting “the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, in the courts of the Lord,” that all of them together might “eat and be satisfied^d.” In a similar manner, we also are enjoined at stated periods to “lay by us in store as God has prospered us^e,” and even those who are forced to work with their hands for their own maintenance, are yet required to labour the more, in order “that they may have to give to him that needeth^f.” It is true, that there is no need of throwing down all distinctions in society, and feasting with the poor on terms of strict equality; but to make them happy, should be an object near our hearts. Indeed it is, if I may so express myself, a godlike employment: for God himself has shewn a marked respect for the poor, in that “he has chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of his kingdom^g.” He has set us an example of this very thing in the dispensation of his Gospel. In the verses following the text, he represents himself as having made a great feast, and invited many: and, because his invitations are slighted by the rich, the gay, the worldly, he says to his servants, “Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind: yea, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled^h.” Thus, as by his Gospel he makes them pre-eminently partakers of his spiritual blessings, so we also, as

^c Deut. xv. 11.

^d Deut. xiv. 28, 29.

^e 1 Cor. xvi. 2.

^f Eph. iv. 28.

^g Jam. ii. 5.

^h ver. 16—23.

far as our circumstances will admit of it, should make them partakers of our temporal blessings.]

This, though felt and acknowledged by us as a duty, needs yet to be enforced upon us, in order that it may be reduced to practice: we will therefore proceed to enforce it by,

II. Some reasons—

The two things which men aim at in the disposal of their money, are pleasure and advantage: and it is from an idea that these are more to be obtained by feasting with the rich, that people almost universally prefer that method of expending their property. But we do not hesitate to say, that the mode of expending it which has been recommended to you has greatly the superiority in point,

1. Of gratification—

[We do not deny but that there is considerable pleasure in entertaining one's friends: we must however assert, that that pleasure is carnal in its nature, and transient in its duration. But the delight which arises from providing for the poor, and making them happy, is solid, refined, permanent. If it were nothing more than the thought of contributing to lessen the miseries to which human nature is exposed, it would be very delightful; the very sensation of sympathy is exquisite: but the thought of being God's messenger to them for good, and the hope that "by our means thanksgivings will abound to Godⁱ," and that our heavenly Parent will be adored and magnified through us; *this* is a sensation which even an angel might envy. We can easily conceive the comfort which an indigent fellow-creature feels in being relieved from his distress; yet is that not to be compared with the happiness excited in the bosom of him who administers the relief: for One who cannot err has told us, that "it is more blessed to give than to receive." The comfort of the relieved continues only whilst the pressure of his calamity is removed: but the donor may look back at the distance of many years, and feel again the same delights which he experienced at the first communication of his alms.

Amongst the many considerations which tend to perpetuate his comfort, one in particular is, that, in administering to the poor, he has ministered to the Lord Jesus Christ himself. Christ has condescended to identify himself with his poor

ⁱ 2 Cor. ix. 12.

members, and to regard every thing which is done for them, not only as done *for* him, but as done personally *to* him^k. O what a thought is this to one who feels his obligations to Christ! I suppose there is scarcely an enlightened Christian in the universe, who has not envied the women who had the privilege of “ministering to him of their substance^l,” but the man who delights in comforting the poor, occupies their province; and is privileged to view, as it were, the very person of Christ in all such guests. Verily, he can have but little love for his Saviour who does not feel more delight in this thought, than in all the gratifications which high company and a well-spread table ever afforded.]

2. Of benefit—

[All the benefit that the feasting of the rich brings with it, is, the getting a good name among them, and the being invited to their feasts in return. The latter of these is what our Lord rather teaches us to dread, inasmuch as it cancels the obligation we have conferred, and makes our expenditure in vain^m. It is to be lamented, however, that amongst his reputed followers, the being invited to feasts is no great object of dread. But the man who feasts the poor, can look for no recompence from them; (except indeed in their blessings and their prayers;) but from God, he shall be recompensed a hundred-fold.

The communications of grace and peace shall abound towards him whose delight is in doing good: “having watered others he shall be watered himself.” This is declared by an inspired writer in the most express and most eloquent terms: “If thou deal thy bread to the hungry, and bring the poor that are cast out to thy house; if when thou seest the naked, thou cover him, and hide not thyself from thine own flesh; if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noon-day: and the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail notⁿ.” What a glorious recompence is this!

But there is a time coming when his recompence shall be complete. “At the resurrection of the just,” God will acknowledge all that has been done for the poor as “a loan lent to him; and he will repay it” all with interest^o. We take for granted indeed that the person is a believer in Christ, and that, in relieving the poor, he does it for Christ’s sake, and not from an idea of establishing a righteousness of his own. This

^k Matt. xxv. 35—40.

^l Luke viii. 3.

^m ver. 12.

ⁿ Isai. lviii. 7—11.

^o Prov. xix. 17. 1 Tim. vi. 17—19.

must certainly be supposed; else the liberality, however great, will only turn to the confusion of him who exercises it, and prove a foundation of sand to him who builds upon it: but, supposing the person's state to be right before God in other respects, and his motives to be pure in the distribution of his alms, we do not hesitate to say, that he treasures up a rich reward for himself in the day that Christ shall judge the world; insomuch that a cup of cold water only that has been given by him from right principles, "shall in no wise lose its reward." Jehovah himself in that day shall make a feast, a marriage-feast for his Son: and to it will he invite those who for his sake provided for the poor. There shall they sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob; and be regaled with all the delights of Paradise. Well is it said in reference to that day, "Blessed are they which are called to the marriage-supper of the Lamb^p." Yes; in the words of our text it is said, "Thou shalt be blessed;" but *how* blessed the liberal man shall be, none but God himself can fully declare.]

We sum up the whole in two words of ADVICE—

1. Accept God's invitations to you—

[You have already heard that in his Gospel he has spread a feast, even "a feast of fat things full of marrow, and of wines on the lees well refined^q." The persons whom he invites are, not "the rich who think themselves in need of nothing, but the wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked^r." As his servants, we invite you all; and declare to you, that the poorer you are, and the more unworthy in your own apprehensions, the more acceptable you will be at his table. Need I say how much God will be delighted to see his table furnished with guests? Hear his own invitation: hear how he pleads with you, and entreats you to accept it; hear how he expatiates on the delicacies he has provided for your repast^s. He sets before you nothing less than the body and blood of his dear Son; which Christ himself says, is "meat indeed, and drink indeed^t." Think of this, and let nothing for a moment delay your coming.]

2. Conform your invitations to his—

[We are enjoined to "be followers (imitators) of God as dear children:" "to be merciful as he is merciful, and perfect as he is perfect." Behold then at what expense he has made provision for our needy souls! "he has not spared even his own Son, but has delivered *him* up for us all." Let not us then grudge any sacrifice for the comfort and support of our

^p Rev. xix. 7—9.

^q Isai. xxv. 6.

^r Rev. iii. 17, 18.

^s Isai. lv. 1, 2.

^t John vi. 55.

afflicted brethren. Economy should be practised, in order to liberality; and self-denial, in order to an enlarging of our ability to supply the wants of others. You well “know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich^u: Let the same mind be in you that was in him.” Let the happiness of others be your happiness, and the luxury of doing good be your daily food. Thus will every thing you have be sanctified to you^x: and the blessing of God will rest upon you in life^y, in death^z, and to all eternity^a.]

^u 2 Cor. viii. 9.

^x Luke xi. 41.

^y Heb. vi. 10.

^z Ps. xli. 1.

^a Luke xvi. 9.

MDXL.

THE GREAT SUPPER.

Luke xiv. 16—18. *Then said he unto him, A certain man made a great supper, and bade many: and sent his servant at supper-time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready. And they all with one consent began to make excuse.*

PERSONS, who are very ignorant of true religion, often express a desire to participate its blessings. Wherever we find them thus open to instruction, we should endeavour to teach them the way of God more perfectly. This was the uniform practice of our blessed Saviour^a. The person, that addressed our Lord, seemed but little acquainted with the nature of the Messiah's kingdom^b. Our Lord took occasion to rectify his apprehensions on that subject, and to shew him, under the idea of a feast, that the provisions of his Gospel would be slighted by that whole nation. The parable in this view declares the rejection of the Jews and the call of the Gentiles; but it is also applicable to nominal Christians in all ages. Its import, as it respects us, may be comprised in two observations:

I. God invites us to partake of the blessings of his Gospel—

^a See John iv. 15, 21. and vi. 34, 35.

^b ver. 15.

The Gospel dispensation is fitly compared to a sumptuous feast—

[In feasts every thing is set forth that can gratify the palate. Thus in the Gospel there is every thing that can administer delight or vigour to the soul. There is pardon for all the sins that we have ever committed: there is strength against all the corruptions or temptations that can assail us: there is communion with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: there are foretastes and earnest of the heavenly glory. On these accounts the prophets also spake of it under the image of a feast^c.]

God sends his servants to invite men to his table—

[The first persons that were invited to it were the Jews. Upon their rejection of the Gospel the Gentiles were to be called in^d. The invitation to us Gentiles is still continued: the servants of God are sent to *hasten* your tardy steps. We are to inform you, that “all things are now ready, and, as it were, waiting for you^e: we are moreover to *urge* you to accept the invitation: we are to take, as it were, no denial from you^f. Such is God’s desire to bless us with all spiritual blessings.]

Nor are any, however mean or abandoned, to be overlooked—

[We are to go and call people of all ranks and descriptions: we are to search out the persons most distant, most obscure, most impious^g: we are to bring them in, however labouring under infirmities of body, or distress of soul^h. God will have his “house to be filled:” nor are his servants to desist from their labours till that work be accomplished; and, thanks be to God! “there is yet room” for more.]

One would suppose that such rich blessings would meet with universal acceptance: but,

II. We ungratefully reject them with vain and frivolous excuses—

^c Isai. xxv. 6.

^d Rom. xi. 11.

^e The blood, which is to cleanse you, is already shed: the Spirit, that is to renew you, is already poured out: God is reconciled and is ready to receive you: nothing is wanting, but that you come and fill the place prepared for you.

^f It is the force of persuasion which we are to use; not the force of penal statutes: such compulsion as that, is as abhorrent from reason, as it is from religion.

^g This seems intimated by the streets and lanes of the city, and the highways and hedges without the city.

^h “The poor, the halt,” &c. may refer to their spiritual as well as temporal condition.

Few find any inclination to accept the invitations of the Gospel—

[The Jews in their day withstood the solicitation of the Apostles: so now, all, however importuned, “begin to make excuse.” Some plead the importance of their earthly business; others urge that they must attend to the concerns of their families. Thus earthly cares, or carnal ease and pleasure, stupify the world.]

But God will resent the contempt poured upon his mercy—

[The pleas urged in the parable are not sinful in themselves: but nothing, however good, should keep us from attending to the one thing needful. Every concern becomes sinful, when it is inordinately followed. Hence God declares that he is “angry” with those who offer such pleas: he threatens that they shall never partake of the feast they so despise, nor even “taste” of his bounty to all eternity. “None,” however attentive to their worldly callings, shall find an exception in their favour. How awful their state, who are never to *taste* of pardon, peace, or glory! May we never bring upon ourselves so terrible a doom!]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are *averse* to accept the invitations of the Gospel—

[Every one is forward to offer pleas in extenuation of his guilt; and, while some civilly beg to be excused, others roughly answer, “I cannot come.” But whatever be our plea, and in what way soever it be offered, God will discern its fallacy. Indeed the very persons who refuse our invitations, know that their excuses will avail nothing in the day of judgment¹. What folly, then, is it to offer *that* in justification of ourselves now, which will serve only to condemn us in the last day! Let us no longer cherish such fatal delusions. We may give to the world and our family a due portion of our care; but let nothing keep us from the feast which God has prepared.]

2. Those who are *afraid* to come at the bidding of their Lord—

[Many are kept from Christ by an apprehension of their own unworthiness. They think it would be presumption in them to accept his invitation: but it is not possible to describe more clearly the persons invited. If we be poor, or halt, or maimed, or blind, we are expressly called; nor is our distance

¹ “I *can* not,” and “I *will* not,” will then be found to have meant the same thing.

or unworthiness any ground of exclusion. Let none then yield to unbelieving fears. We would “compel” you all, by every argument we can devise. Reflect on the greatness of the host that invites you, and the excellence of the feast he sets before you. Consider the blessedness of partaking of it, and the certain consequences of absenting yourselves from it^k. Let all come, and “delight their souls with fatness.” The command given to the Church is yet addressed to you^l—]

^k If the Sacrament be administered, it may be observed, that the table is now spread before their eyes, &c.

^l Cant. v. 1.

MDXLI.

THE FOOLISH BUILDER AND THE INCONSIDERATE KING.

Luke xiv. 28—33. *Which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace. So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.*

MANKIND in general, when they want us to engage in their pursuits, are apt to exaggerate the advantages, and to hide as much as possible the difficulties, that will attend the adoption of their plans. Our Lord, on the contrary, declared plainly to his followers, the conflicts they must engage in, and the losses they must sustain, if they would be his Disciples. In the verses preceding the text, he states in very strong language the only terms on which he would admit them into his family; and, having cautioned them by two familiar parables against engaging rashly in his service, he again reminds them, that they must forsake all, if they will follow him. To elucidate the passage, we shall consider,

I. The scope of the parables—

Both of them have the same general tendency to guard men against a hasty and inconsiderate profession of religion. But,

The former points out *the folly* of such conduct—

[Every one sees, that a builder, who, through neglecting to count the cost, should be compelled to leave his structure unfinished, would be universally derided as a foolish man. But incomparably greater is his folly who begins to follow Christ, and afterwards by his apostasy shews, that he had never duly considered how much was requisite to make us Christians indeed. The very people who have turned him aside, will be the first to deride him for his instability; and while they reverence him who maintains a firm and consistent conduct, they will despise in their hearts the man who proves unfaithful to his God. The saints indeed will not “mock him,” because they know what a “fearful thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God;” but they will pity him, as a poor infatuated creature, who has “left off to behave himself wisely,” and reduced himself by his folly to the extremest misery. Nor is it long ere he himself will see his folly in its true light; when he will behold afar off that heaven upon which he turned his back, and inherit that portion which he so thoughtlessly preferred.]

The latter leads us rather to contemplate the *danger* of such conduct—

[A king who should inconsiderately plunge himself into a war with an enemy that was too powerful for him, would expose both his kingdom and his life to the most imminent danger. Thus it is also with a man who commences a warfare with sin and Satan without knowing how he shall make head against them: for as a hasty profession of religion exposes him to self-deception, so a hasty dereliction of it will subject him to the heavier condemnation. It is true that all must perish who do not enlist under the banner of Christ; but it is equally true, that cowardly soldiers, who forsake their standard, are far more guilty than if they had never been enrolled upon his list: “It is better never to have known the way of righteousness, than, after having known it, to turn from it:” their end is worse than their beginning; and they shall be punished with more stripes, in proportion to the advantages they have enjoyed, and the professions they have made.]

These parables will afford still further instruction, if we consider,

II. Our Lord's improvement of them—

Our Lord did not amuse his hearers with speculative truths, but brought them home to their conscience by a direct and personal application—

1. We must count the cost—

[Here the cost is plainly told us; “We must forsake all;” that is, forsake all *comparatively* in respect of affection, and *absolutely*, whenever it stands in competition with our duty: nor, if we refuse these terms, can we be his disciples. We are not indeed to cast away our possessions at all events; but so to withdraw our affections from them, as to be willing to resign them whenever the retaining of them shall be inconsistent with our allegiance to him. This we ought to weigh in our minds, and to consider whether the benefits of religion be sufficient to counterbalance its trials. We must be ready to part with our reputation, our interest, our carnal ease and pleasures, our friends, our liberty, our life: but in return for them we may expect, “the honour that cometh of God,” “the riches of Christ that are unsearchable,” “the pleasures that are at God’s right hand for evermore:” we shall even now possess that “peace which passeth all understanding,” together with the liberty of the sons of God; and soon we shall inherit eternal life and glory in his more immediate presence. We should dispassionately balance these against each other, that we may see which scale preponderates, and whether the pearl be worth the price demanded for it.]

2. We must pay it without reluctance—

[All have not the same trials to endure; but all will meet with some which shall prove a test of their sincerity. Whenever, or in whatever degree, we be tried, we must shew our decided purpose, our fixed determination. We must “*hate*” (that is, we must esteem as worthless and of no account) our nearest friends, our dearest interests, yea, our very lives, when they stand in competition with our duty to God. Nothing must tempt us to draw back from him. If once we draw the sword, we must throw away the scabbard. If we slay not our spiritual enemies, they will destroy us. We must “endure to the end if ever we would be saved.” On the other hand, we have every encouragement to “war a good warfare;” for, if we go forth in the strength of the Lord God, we shall be “more than conquerors through him that loved us.”]

We conclude with an ADDRESS to,

1. The inconsiderate Christian—

[Men promise at their baptism that they will renounce the world, the flesh, and the devil; but never afterwards think of fulfilling so much as one of their engagements. They expect

wages without work, and victory without a conflict. But such conduct will expose them to “everlasting shame and contempt,” and will ultimately involve them in irrecoverable ruin. Let it be remembered then, that, as it is no easy matter to be a Christian, so nothing but real Christianity will be of any avail. If we accept not salvation on the terms which God has prescribed, it is in vain to hope that we shall ever participate the blessings it affords.]

2. The mistaken Christian—

[It is too common to imagine that we can retain the friendship of the world, and preserve at the same time our fidelity to Christ. But we are plainly warned to the contrary. Our Lord elsewhere assures us, that we cannot serve God and mammon. And St. James affirms the friendship of the world to be enmity with God; and that whosoever desires to be the friend of the world, he is thereby constituted the enemy of God^a. Would to God that this were more considered! But many, because they make some sacrifices, suppose that they come up to the terms which Christianity demands, when in fact, they retain their bosom lusts, and sacrifice only those, which their change of situation, or their more advanced age, has rendered less importunate. Instead of being jealous of their own sincerity, they are over-confident: and instead of being filled with shame and sorrow on account of their defects, they are ever pleading for indulgence, and labouring to persuade themselves that they come up to the mark prescribed to them in the Scriptures. Let such persons beware, lest, while they value themselves on their more liberal and enlarged sentiments, they deceive their own souls, and be found wanting in the day of final retribution. If when Christ calls them to forsake *all*, they are striving to forsake as little as possible, they have good reason to fear that they have not the mind which was in Christ Jesus.]

3. The timid Christian—

[Many, when the hour of trial comes, are ready to faint and draw back. But what are our trials when compared with those of thousands who have gone before us? We have not yet resisted unto blood. Besides, have we not been told repeatedly, that if we have no cross we must not expect a crown? Let us recollect, that, “if we turn back, God’s soul shall have no pleasure in us;” and, that the whole world will be a poor exchange for an immortal soul. “As soldiers we must expect to endure hardness.” Let us then “be strong and very courageous:” let us “fight the good fight, and quit ourselves

^a Jam. iv. 4.

like men:" and let us reflect for our encouragement, that, though our "enemies may encompass us like bees," "there are more for us than against us."]

4. The steadfast Christian—

[Have any ever found cause to regret that they endured the cross? Will any complain that they ever suffered too much for Christ? Has not a rich reward been invariably enjoyed by them in the testimony of their own conscience, and in the consolations of God's Spirit? Yea, whatever they have suffered, have they not had "an hundredfold more given them even in this present life; and will they not have life everlasting also in the world to come?" Surely the intrepid Christian has "chosen the good part; nor shall it ever be taken away from him." Go on then, "strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." "See that ye lose not the things that ye have wrought; but that ye receive a full reward." "Be faithful unto death, and God shall give you a crown of life."]

MDXLII.

THE LOST SHEEP.

Luke xv. 3—7. *And he spake this parable unto them, saying, What man of you having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.*

THERE is nothing more injurious to ourselves or others than prejudice. While it operates as a bar to our own improvement, it leads us to put a perverse construction on every thing we see or hear: it will extract matter for censure even from the most innocent or laudable actions. The malignity of it cannot be seen in more striking colours than in the conduct of the Pharisees towards our Lord: he conversed familiarly with the most abandoned sinners for their good: such condescension ought to have been regarded with the highest approbation, but it

provoked only the spleen and malice of the haughty Pharisees. Our Lord however took the best method of silencing their murmurs. By appealing to their own consciences he forced them to condemn themselves.

We shall consider,

I. The parable—

The scope of the parable is not so much to mark the resemblance between a sinner and a lost sheep, as between our Lord and a faithful shepherd—

The parallel between them will appear, if we consider,

1. A shepherd's concern for his sheep when lost—

[Though a man had ninety-nine others, he would not be indifferent about the loss of one. If he missed one, he would immediately begin to make inquiries about it: he would not expect it ever to trace back its steps unto the fold again. If he gained intelligence respecting it, he would go in quest of it: leaving the rest in the pasture^a, he would seek diligently till he found it: and the more it was in danger of being devoured by wolves, the more assiduously would he exert himself for its recovery. Such is the conduct of our Lord towards our ruined race. We all are fitly compared to sheep wandering from the fold^b. Never do we think of “returning to the great Shepherd of our souls,” though every moment exposed to the assaults of a devouring lion^c. Our compassionate Shepherd came from heaven itself to seek us. His solicitude for us is well delineated by an inspired prophet^d—. He moreover sends his servants into every part of the world. By his word and Spirit he endeavours to apprehend us: nor does he account any labour too great, if he may but succeed at last. Though he has myriads in his fold above, he cannot endure to lose one; nor, while so much as one of his sheep is wandering from him, will he relax his endeavours to bring it back.]

2. His joy over it when recovered—

[When a shepherd has found his lost sheep, he seizes it with his crook: the more it struggles for liberty, the more he labours to secure it: rather than lose it again, he brings it back upon his shoulders: exulting in his success, he announces it to every one he meets, and receives with pleasure the congratulations of his friends. Do we not here also see the benevolence of our blessed Lord? Having apprehended us by his grace, he overcomes our resistance: having prospered in his labour,

^a The Jews called all ground which was not arable. The wilderness.

^b Isai. liii. 6.

^c 1 Pet. v. 8.

^d Ezek. xxxiv. 11—16.

he regrets not the pains he has bestowed: he is satisfied with all the travail of his soul when he beholds us safe. With joy he brings us to the society of his peculiar people, and calls on them also to rejoice together with him. This is beautifully described by the pen of inspiration^e—, and gloriously realized in every quarter of the globe.]

Our Lord himself elucidates the parable by suggesting,

II. The improvement of it—

Nothing could be more pertinent than this parable to the occasion on which it was delivered—

“Repentance” is properly represented as the return of the soul to God—

[While we remain impenitent we are afar off from God: we wander further and further from the path of life. But in repentance we are made to see our guilt and danger: we gladly embrace the mercy offered to us in the Gospel, and give up ourselves to God to be governed by his will, and be saved by his grace.]

Hence the repentance of sinners becomes a matter of joy to all the holy angels—

[Whether the glorified saints take any interest in our welfare we know not; but we are sure that angels are not unconcerned spectators of us^f: they greatly delight both in God’s glory, and our good. The perseverance of established saints is a permanent source of happiness to them: but the conversion of a sinner fills them with more abundant joy^g. The more desperate his condition had appeared, the more exquisite is the delight they feel in his recovery^h. Even “in the presence of God” himself they are attracted by this sight: not all the glory of the godhead can divert their attention from it; nor all the felicity of heaven indispose them for rejoicing in it. However strange this idea may seem, it is truly scriptural. Nothing can be plainer than the affirmation in the textⁱ; nor can we doubt it without greatly dishonouring the character of Christ^k.]

^e Zeph. iii. 17.

^f Heb. i. 14.

^g They who need no repentance, are those, who having been converted to God, need not μετανοῦν, an entire change of mind, but only to be confirmed in their present views, and to be rendered conformable to them.

^h So Jacob on account of his son Joseph, Gen. xlv 26-28. and xlv. 30.

ⁱ See also ver. 10.

^k “The faithful witness.” Rev. i. 5.

In this view the repentance of men should excite joy in us also—

[This, though not expressed, is evidently implied in the words of our text. The chief scope of the parable was to reprove the envious spirit of the Pharisees. And what could so forcibly condemn it as the contrast here exhibited? Does Christ rejoice at the return of a sinner, and shall *we* repine? Do all the angels in heaven exult at such a sight, and shall *we* make it an occasion of offence? Are *we* then indeed better judges of what is good than they? or do we well to oppose what they so desire to see accomplished? Let us take heed lest we be found at last to have “fought against God:” let us rather encourage others both by precept and example: let us adore our Saviour for his condescension and grace toward sinful man; and let that, which was urged as an objection against him, be the greatest commendation of him to our souls¹.]

ADDRESS—

[While some are turning unto God, others are striving to draw them back. But let *those, who have scoffed at religion*, confess their folly; and *those, who have discouraged repentance in others*, repent of their iniquity. On the other hand, let the *humble penitent* go to God with confidence. Who can read this parable and doubt Christ’s willingness to save him? If there were but *one* penitent amongst us all, the angels would rejoice over him. How then would they shout for joy if we ALL began to implore mercy! Our past iniquities would rather enhance than diminish their glorying on our account^m. Let not those therefore, whose cases appear most hopeless, despond: let them forbear to trample any longer on the Saviour’s love: let it be their ambition to give joy to those whom they have so often grieved. Thus also shall they join in the general chorus at the last day, and ascribe the “glory to him who loved them, and gave himself for themⁿ.”]

¹ ver. 2.

^m Not because they take pleasure in sin, but because they regard us as brands plucked out of the fire.

ⁿ Rev. i. 5, 6.

MDXLIII.

THE LOST PIECE OF SILVER.

Luke xv. 8—10. *What woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it? And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together,*

saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost. Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.

THERE is nothing in which we are so deeply interested as the extent and riches of the Redeemer's grace. His familiar converse with publicans and sinners affords the richest encouragement to us, when we are bowed down under a sense of guilt. His condescension towards them indeed excited only disgust in the proud Pharisees; but Jesus was the more careful to vindicate the conduct which they condemned, and in repeated parables assured them, that it was the joy of his heart to save even the vilest of mankind. The parable of the lost piece of money very nearly resembles that which precedes it: nevertheless it suggests many useful thoughts which are appropriate to itself. Its import may be unfolded under the following observations:

I. There are none so worthless but the Lord is deeply concerned about them—

The woman expressed very great anxiety about the piece of silver she had lost—

[The piece of silver was but of very trifling value in itself^a: yet she felt much solicitude about it in her mind; nor was she content to lose it, notwithstanding she had several others left.]

Thus is our blessed Lord concerned about the souls of men—

[In some points of view the soul is undoubtedly of great value, nor can the whole world itself be put in competition with it: but to Jesus the souls of men are not of the smallest importance. If they were righteous, their goodness could not extend to him^b: they could never profit him, nor add to his happiness^c. If all that ever existed were annihilated, he would suffer no loss: if men were necessary to his honour or happiness, he could create millions in an instant. But the souls of men are inexpressibly vile and guilty in his sight: till they have been washed in his blood, they are exposed to his wrath and indignation; nor is it any thing but his marvellous compassion that preserves them from everlasting destruction^d.

^a About sevenpence halfpenny.

^b Ps. xvi. 2.

^c Job xxii. 2, 3.

^d Lam. iii. 22.

Nevertheless he is greatly concerned about the loss even of one amongst them. Though he has myriads that are now safely lodged in his hands, he cannot rest satisfied about those that are yet in danger. By the prophets he expressed his deep regret for those that were in a perishing condition^e: in the days of his flesh he wept over the most abandoned of the human race^f: and to this hour he is grieved at the thought of any dying in their sins^g.]

Nor is his concern for them expressed only by inactive wishes :

II. There are no exertions, however great, which he will not use for their recovery—

The woman is represented as doing every thing which could be devised for the recovery of her lost piece of silver—

[She instantly lighted a candle, that she might search in every dark corner of her house. She moreover swept her house, that, if it were hid under any dirt or rubbish, she might find it : nor did she relax her endeavours till they were crowned with success. What more could she have done if the lost money had been of the greatest value?]

Thus our Lord uses all possible means for the recovery of lost souls—

[Were we lying in utter darkness? he has brought the light of his Gospel: this light he has sent into all the darkest corners of the earth^h. In the days of his flesh he used all diligence himself: since that time he has commissioned his servants to go into all the world. He has enjoined them to “be instant in their work, in season and out of season:” he has even threatened that, if one perish through their negligence, he will “require his blood at their hands:” he has moreover sent his Spirit to aid them in their endeavours, and to search the very inmost recesses of our benighted souls. However fruitless their exertions may have been, they are never to give up any for lost, as long as there is a possibility of their being found. May he not well say, “What could I have done more for them than I have doneⁱ?” If he appeals to us about the conduct of a woman who had lost her money, how much more may he appeal to us respecting his own conduct?]

When his labours are successful, then his kindness appears in its brightest colours—

^e Jer. xiii. 27. Hos. xi. 8. ^f Luke xix. 41. ^g 2 Pet. iii. 9.

^h Isai. ix. 2.

ⁱ Isai. v. 4.

III. There is nothing so pleasing to him as the recovery of one from his lost state—

The woman is represented as inviting all her neighbours to rejoice with her—

[The cause of her joy seems very inadequate to such expressions of it: but women, being conversant mainly with domestic matters, are apt to be affected with small things. Her whole property also being small, she may be supposed to feel the more at the recovery of that part which had been in danger; and the circumstance of its having been lost would render the subsequent possession of it more pleasant.]

Thus our Lord and all the angels in heaven rejoice over a repenting sinner—

[This is the main scope of this parable, as well as of that which precedes, and that which follows it; hence it is strongly marked in every one of the parables: we must not therefore omit it, or think the repetition of it tedious. Our Lord well knew the misery of a soul that perishes in sin: the angels too are doubtless well informed on this subject. Were it never to be sensible of its loss, there would be the less reason to regret it: but, if not put among the treasures of God, it must be for ever miserable. To prevent this is the joy and delight of our blessed Saviour. For this he came down from heaven, assumed our nature, and died upon the cross: for this he is dispensing to us continually his word and Spirit. The effecting of this is the consummation of all his wishes and purposes: hence, however inadequate a cause of joy this may seem, he accounts it his highest honour and happiness. He is “satisfied with the travail of his soul,” when one that was lost is found; and all the angels that surround his throne rejoice together with him. As all hell is moved with triumph at the condemnation of one sinner^k, so does all heaven exult in the elevation of one to happiness and glory.]

INFER—

1. How strange is it that men should have so little regard to their own souls!

[The generality of men are as careless of their souls as if they were of no value. But should we disregard that which the Son of God seeks with so much anxiety? Should we be so indifferent about our own happiness, when all the angels of heaven would shout for joy at the prospect of it? Let us never be satisfied with being immersed in darkness and wickedness — — — Let us rather be ambitious to have a place

^k Isai. xiv. 9, 10.

among the Lord's treasures — — — And let us be thankful that, though lost, we are not yet gone beyond recovery.]

2. How blessed are the effects of a faithful administration of the Gospel!

[It is by the Gospel that Jesus comes to search for lost sinners. If indeed it be delivered only in a general way, it will scarcely ever prove effectual for men's salvation: it is only the close *application* of the word, that will ever reach the conscience: but, when faithfully preached, and accompanied with God's Spirit, it will find out men in their darkest recesses. O that God may now make use of it to sweep away the rubbish under which we have lain! — — — and that we may be found of him, ere he "sweep us away with the besom of destruction!"]

3. What reason have we to adore the condescension and grace of Christ!

[If he did not seek for us we should lie in our sins to all eternity, and when found at the last day, that word would be verified in us¹— What kindness then is it in him to use such means for our recovery! — — — Let us never forget what obligations we owe to him. Let us acknowledge ourselves *his*, that he may do with us as he will. He will then keep us that we may not fall from him any more^m, and will lodge us safely in his coffers amidst the treasures he has been collecting from the foundation of the worldⁿ.]

¹ Jer. vi. 30.

^m John x. 28. 1 Pet. i. 5.

ⁿ Eph. i. 10, 14. Mal. iii. 17.

MDXLIV.

ANGELS REJOICE OVER PENITENTS.

Luke xv. 10. *I say unto you, There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.*

HOWEVER paradoxical the observation may appear, man is really an enemy to his own happiness. He loves sin, which is the source of all misery: and hates repentance, which is the only remedy for that misery. He cannot persuade himself that that which he professes to seek after, is to be found in penitence and self-denial. But, had we no other proof of the blessedness which attaches to true repentance, it were sufficient to know, upon the authority of Jesus

Christ himself, that the very angels in heaven rejoice over any sinner in whom this good work is begun.

We will take occasion from our text to shew you,

I. What is that repentance which causes joy in heaven—

It is not every kind or degree of repentance that produces this effect: none but that which is effectual to the sinner's salvation, will excite these benevolent emotions in the breasts of angels. It consists in,

1. Sorrow for sin—

[This is absolutely necessary. If sin be not our burthen and grief, we have not the smallest spark of true repentance. There is a great difference indeed between the sorrow of the world, and that which is caused by a sense of sin. But in this there must be an agreement, that sin must lie as a heavy burthen upon the soul; and under a sense of it we must experience brokenness of heart and contrition: for it is "the broken and contrite heart, and that only, which God will not despise."]

2. Hatred of sin—

[Many will be sorry that they have brought themselves to shame and trouble, when they have no aversion to the sins which they have committed. Many also will hate sin in others, when they do not hate it in themselves. When David, for instance, was totally unhumbled for his own enormous wickedness, he was so indignant against the man who was supposed to have taken the poor man's lamb, that he would have had him put to death for his offence. And Jehu was extremely zealous against the idolatry of Ahab, while yet he was very indulgent to his own crimes. But if we are truly penitent, we shall hate our own sins more than any; and shall be disposed to seek their utter destruction, even though they be dear as a right hand, or a right eye. It will teach us to say with David, "I hate every false way."]

3. A loathing of oneself on account of sin—

[Sin is a disorder that defiles and debases the whole soul. That is no exaggerated description of the prophet, who says of us, that "from the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in us, but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores." Now we may conceive in a measure, what loathing we should feel if we saw a person full of sores and ulcers: and such is the disgust which a view of our own souls should create within us. This is repeatedly mentioned as the experience of the Lord's people, even after that God is pacified towards

them^a: and every one who really knows himself, will exclaim with Job, “Behold, I am vile, I repent, and abhor myself in dust and ashes^b.”]

4. A fleeing to Christ from the guilt and power of sin—

[As long as we retain a hope of healing our own souls, we have not that “repentance which is unto life:” we evidently have low thoughts of sin, both of its guilt and power. We must be brought to an utter despair of washing away our sin by our tears, or of breaking its force by our resolutions. We must see that there is no hope for us but in the atoning blood of Christ, and in his all-sufficient grace: and we must rely simply on him, saying, “In the Lord have I righteousness and strength^c.”]

The importance of this to man is obvious: but it is not so clear,

II. Why the angels take so deep an interest in it—

Whether the spirits of departed men have any knowledge of what passes in this world, may well be doubted: but it is certain that the angels are intimately connected with mankind, and take a lively interest in the things relating to them. They view the return of a penitent with peculiar delight;

1. Because it tends so greatly to the benefit of man—

[The angels cannot but be apprised of the misery into which the once happy, but now apostate, spirits are fallen: and they know that a participation of that misery is reserved for impenitent sinners. Whether they feel any pity towards a sinner in the midst of his rebellion, we cannot say: but we apprehend, that they rather look upon him with holy indignation, and stand ready to execute any judgment that God may see fit to inflict upon him^d. But their benevolent hearts rejoice, if they see any one fleeing from the impending judgments, and setting his face in good earnest towards the heavenly kingdom. They congratulate him in their minds, and exult in the thought of having him to all eternity a partner of their joys.]

2. Because it opens fresh scope for the exercise of their own love—

[It is essential to benevolence to delight in opportunities of exerting itself for the benefit of the objects beloved. Now,

^a Ezek. xx. 43. and xvi. 63.

^b Job xl. 4. and xlii. 6.

^c Isai. xlv. 24.

^d Acts xii. 23.

as soon as ever a sinner repents and becomes an "heir of salvation, angels are sent forth to minister unto him." "They encamp round about him" for the purpose. If they behold him turning out of the path of duty, as Balaam; or lingering in a place of danger, as Lot; or in any respect likely to "dash his foot against a stone;" they will lend him their friendly aid in such a way as shall tend most to his eternal welfare. How they act upon us, we are not told: but of their agency there can be no doubt. It is highly probable that they are busily employed in counteracting the devices of those wicked spirits, who are ever seeking to destroy us. In a dying hour, we are sure they encompass the bed of a true penitent, and watch for the dismission of his spirit from its house of clay, in order that they may bear it in triumph to the realms of bliss. Nor are their labours of love then terminated: for in the day of judgment they will gather together the saints wheresoever they were scattered, in order to present them before the throne of their Judge, and expedite the final completion of their happiness. These offices being so congenial with their own feelings, they rejoice in every thing that affords them an opportunity to perform them.]

3. Because it brings the highest glory to God—

[The contemplation of the Divine glory is doubtless the highest source of their felicity. Now in the return of a penitent sinner they behold all the persons of the Godhead shining forth in the brightest splendour. They behold all the wisdom and power and grace of *the Father* glorified, whenever his eternal counsels respecting the salvation of a soul are accomplished. They behold the infinite virtue of *the Son's* atonement, whenever the iniquities of a repenting prodigal are blotted out. They behold the wonderful "love of *the Holy Spirit*, and the invincible efficacy of his operations, when a creature, once bearing the impress of Satan himself, is transformed into the image of his God. When they had first a clear prospect of these things at the incarnation of our Lord, they sang, "Glory to God in the highest;" and every fresh manifestation of this mercy has filled them with additional and increasing joy.]

ADDRESS—

1. To the impenitent—

[Think what painful reflections your state suggests to those benevolent spirits; 'There are those infatuated people, laden with sins; on the brink of eternity; followed with overtures of mercy; assured that if they die in their present state they must perish for ever; and yet continuing impenitent! What a miracle of mercy it is that God does not instantly cut them down, and assign them the portion they deserve!' Think

too how the evil angels are exulting over you; ‘There they are; we have them fast in our chains; we shall soon have them as partners of our misery; then how shall we triumph over our God! Yes; the *Father’s* counsels with respect to them will all be frustrated; the blood of *Christ* will have been shed in vain; the *Spirit’s* operations will have been successfully resisted: though we shall be in hell ourselves, we will enjoy our triumphs even there; for we shall have robbed man of his happiness, and God of his glory.’ O brethren, consider whether ye are willing to afford such a triumph to your bitterest enemy: and beg of Jesus, who is “exalted to give repentance and remission of sins,” that he will bestow these blessings upon you.]

2. To the penitent—

[Let others deride or condemn your change, we will congratulate you upon it^e. The angels would feel no joy at your acquiring a large estate: No; “if a beggar were elevated from a dunghill to a throne,” they would not account it worth one single thought. But if the poorest or vilest person in the universe repent, it fills them with unfeigned joy. They have not so much joy in the very presence of God, but it is capable of being augmented by such a sight as this. Nor is it a day of Pentecost alone that attracts their attention. Even a solitary instance of conversion is sufficient to exhilarate their souls. Go on then, my brethren, sowing in tears; and you shall ere long, in conjunction with the holy angels, reap a harvest of eternal joy.]

^e Ps. cxxvi. 3.

MDXLV.

THE PRODIGAL SON.

Luke xv. 23, 24. *Bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.*

THE willingness of God to receive sinners is abundantly declared in Scripture; but in no place is it so amply, or so beautifully described as in the parable before us. The reference which the parable has to the Jews and Gentiles will be more properly noticed, when we come to consider the conduct of the elder brother: at present we may view it as a lively representation of a sinner’s return to God. The text

leads our attention to three points (which are also the three distinguishing parts of the parable) namely, the Prodigal's departure from his father, his return to him, and his reception with him.

I. His departure—

He went from his father's house, little thinking of the ruin he should bring upon himself—

[The *occasion* of his departure was, that he hated the restraint of his father's presence, and longed for independence, that he might gratify his own inclinations. Hence he desired his father to divide him his portion. But little did he think to what *extent* his passions would carry him. Scarcely had he received his portion, before he left his father, and departed to a distant country, where his actions would pass unnoticed. Having thus thrown the reins upon the neck of his appetites, he was carried on with irresistible impetuosity. From one degree of sin to another he rushed forward without restraint; nor stopped till he had wasted his substance in riotous living. At last he began to feel the *consequences* of his folly: he was reduced to a state of extreme wretchedness; yet he determined to do any thing rather than return to his father. Though a Jew, he submitted for hire to the ignominious employment of feeding swine: his wages however, there being a grievous famine in the land, would not procure him even necessary subsistence. In vain did he attempt to fill his belly with the husks intended for the swine. In vain did he solicit assistance from those who had known him in his more prosperous days. "No man," either from gratitude or compassion, "gave him" any relief.]

Such is the departure of sinners from the presence of their God—

[They have experienced the restraints of education, but have sighed for liberty and independence. With their growing years, they increasingly abuse the mercies which God has bestowed upon them. Their reason, their time, and other talents, they employ in the service of sin. Though they do not all run to the same excess of riot, they live equally at a distance from God. At last perhaps they begin to feel the misery which their neglect of him has brought upon them. His providence too concurs with his grace to make a deeper wound in their conscience: but they try any carnal expedients rather than return to God, nor can ever be prevailed on to turn unto him, till they have fully proved the insufficiency of the creature to afford them help. Whatever they may think

of themselves in such a state, they are really “*dead*,” and “*lost*.”]

But the Prodigal was not gone beyond recovery, as is evident from,

II. His return—

During his departure he had been as a person destitute of reason. At last however, “*coming to himself*,” he thought of his father’s house.

The various steps of his return are worthy of notice—

[He first reflected on the folly and madness of his former ways, and on the incomparably happier state of those who lived under his father’s roof, and whom perhaps he once despised for submitting to such restraints. He then resolved that he would return to his father, and implore his forgiveness: having formed the purpose, he instantly arose to carry it into execution, and set off, destitute as he was, to obtain, if possible, the lowest office among his father’s domestics.]

These exactly describe the steps of a sinner’s return to God—

[He first begins to see how madly and wickedly he has acted. He feels that he has reduced himself to a wretched and perishing condition. He considers how happy are those once despised people, who enjoy the favour of his heavenly Father, and how happy he himself should be, if he might but obtain the meanest place in his family. With these views he determines to abase himself as a vile, self-ruined creature. There are no terms so humiliating, but he finds them suited to his case. He is rather fearful of not humbling himself sufficiently, than of aggravating his sin too much. He resolves that he will go to a throne of grace and ask for mercy; nor will he wait for any more convenient season, lest he should perish before the hoped-for season arrive. He is ashamed indeed to go in so mean and destitute a condition; but he despairs of ever going in any other way. He therefore breaks through all the engagements he has made with sin and Satan, and goes, with all his guilt upon him, to his God and Saviour. He now perhaps may be deemed *mad* by his former companions; but he should rather be considered as now “*coming to himself*.”]

The effect of the Prodigal’s repentance appears in,

III. His reception—

His father, it seems, was wishfully looking out for him; and, on his first appearance, ran to testify his good-will towards him—

[The sight of his returning child caused the father's bowels to yearn over him; nor would he suffer an upbraiding word to escape his lips. When the Prodigal began his confession, the father interrupted him with kisses; and not only would not hear the whole of his confession, but would not even hurt his feelings by saying that he forgave him. He ordered the best robe, with shoes and a ring, to be instantly put upon him, and killed the fatted calf in order to celebrate the joyful occasion.]

What a delightful representation does this give us of the reception which penitents find with God!

[God longs for their salvation even while they are at a distance from him. He notices with joy the first approaches of their souls towards him. Instead of frowning on the prodigal, he receives him with joy. Instead of upbraiding him with his folly, he seals upon his soul a sense of pardon. He arrays him in robes of righteousness and garments of salvation. He adorns him in a manner suited to the relation into which he is brought. He provides for his future comfortable and upright conversation. He rejoices over him as recovered from the dead, and makes it an occasion of festivity to all the angels in heaven. Thus do even the vilest sinners find their hopes, not only realized, but far exceeded. They come for pardon, and obtain joy; for deliverance from hell, and get a title to heaven. Their utmost ambition is to be regarded as the meanest of God's servants; and they are exalted to all the honours and happiness of his beloved children.]

APPLICATION—

[Who would not wish to resemble this Prodigal in his reception with his father? But, in order to it, we must resemble him in his penitence and contrition. Let none think that, because they have been more moral than the Prodigal, they do not need to repent like him. All of us without exception have walked after the imagination of our own hearts, without any love to God's presence, or regard for his authority. Let all of us then cry for mercy, as miserable sinners. The more vile we are in our own eyes, the more acceptable shall we be to God. Some perhaps may fear to return, because they have been so exceeding vile: but let none imagine that they have gone beyond the reach of mercy: the promise of acceptance extends to all without exception^a. "There is bread enough and to spare" for all that will go to God. Let all then accept the Saviour's invitation^b. Let us this day afford an occasion of joy to all the hosts of heaven; then shall we ourselves be soon made partakers of their joy, and dwell, as dear children, in our Father's house for ever and ever.]

^a John vii. 37.

^b Matt. xi. 28.

MDXLVI.

THE PRODIGAL'S ELDER BROTHER.

Luke xv. 28. *And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and entreated him.*

IT is an undeniable fact, that many who have lived a profligate life are received afterwards to God's favour; and that many who have been externally moral are excluded from it. But this ought not to be a stumbling-block to us, since there will always be found a corresponding difference of character in the persons rejected or received. The Prodigal had been abandoned; but was renewed in the spirit of his mind: the elder brother had been moral; but was proud, envious, discontented, querulous. The character of the latter well deserves a distinct consideration. We shall notice,

I. The disposition of the elder brother—

Some think that he was intended to represent a pious character; and doubtless there have been good men, who too nearly resembled him^a: and, on this supposition, his father's address to him will have no difficulty^b. But the parable in this case would not have been suitable to the occasion^c: yea, it would rather have tended to mislead the Pharisees, and to foster the conceit they had of their own piety. His character rather represents that of the murmuring Pharisees, as that of the Prodigal does of the repenting Publicans. It might indeed have some further reference to the Jews and Gentiles^d: but it admirably portrays the character of Pharisees in every age. The two things noticed in the text especially demand our attention:

1. His displeasure at the reception of the Prodigal—

[On being informed of his brother's reception, "he was angry." When entreated by his father to join in the festivity, he began to boast of his own blameless and meritorious conduct. He complained that sufficient respect had not been

^a Jonah iii. 10. and iv. 1, 9. Acts xi. 2, 3. ^b ver. 31.

^c ver. 1—3. ^d Acts xiii. 42, 44, 45. and xxii. 21—23.

paid to his services; he rehearsed with envious triumph and malicious exaggeration the misconduct of the Prodigal; and disdained to acknowledge him as a brother, whom his father had received and entertained as a son. How strongly does this exhibit the disposition and conduct of modern Pharisees! It affords them pain rather than pleasure to hear of the conversion of notorious sinners. When urged to embrace the salvation offered in the Gospel, they deny that they are in danger of perishing, or that they have ever merited the wrath of God: when told that their own righteousness can never justify them before God, they complain that their works are undervalued, and that all inducement to perform them is taken away. The recital of a penitent's joy fills them with envious rage and malignant jealousy: they take occasion from his former misconduct to represent his change as mere hypocrisy; and, instead of regarding him with brotherly affection, they pour contempt upon him as a weak deluded enthusiast^e.]

2. His unwillingness to participate in the happiness provided for him—

[The invitations given to him by his father were rejected with disdain. As the feast was not made in honour of *him*, he could find no pleasure in partaking of it. Thus it is with Pharisees in every age. When we invite them to come to the feast provided in the Gospel, they put us off with excuses. However rich the feast, or sublime the joy, they have no appetite for it, no desire after it. If we were to tell them that their own good works should be the objects of admiration and applause, they would be delighted with the idea, and eagerly embrace the honour offered them: but when they find that all the praise is to be given “to God and to the Lamb,” they have no ear for such music, no taste for such employment.]

Having seen the disposition of the elder brother, let us notice,

II. The conduct of the father as contrasted with it—

Nothing can be more odious than the character we have seen; or more amiable than that which we are going to contemplate. Behold,

1. His forbearance—

[How justly might the father have closed the conference on the first refusal, and given orders for the final exclusion of this insolent complainant! But, as he had borne with the Prodigal in his departure, so now he bears with the pride

^e With what bitter contempt and sarcastic virulence, will they sometimes exclaim, That is one of your *saints*!

and obstinacy of his envious brother. And how long has he exercised his patience towards *us*! Times without number has he entreated us to accept of mercy; yet his invitations have, in many instances, excited nothing but disgust: still however, with much long-suffering, he continues to strive with us by his word and Spirit.]

2. His condescension—

[He did not send a servant, but went out himself to entreat his son; and, instead of controverting, as he might well have done, the statement of his son, *he argued with him on his own principles*^f. He affectionately reminded him, that if no such feast had been made for *him*, there had not been any thing withheld from him that he had desired: that the favour shewn to the Prodigal did not proceed from any undue partiality, but from the peculiar circumstances of his return; and that nothing would be more gratifying to him, than to have both his sons partakers of the same happiness. He shewed him further, that there was a meetness and propriety in the joy manifested on that occasion; and that *he*, as a “*brother*,” ought to join in it with his whole heart. Such is the condescension which we also have experienced at God’s hands. How has he argued with us to overcome our reluctance, and laboured to convince us, when he might justly have left us to our own obstinate resolves!]

3. His love—

[The love shewn by him to the returning Prodigal excites our admiration; but that was no less which was manifested to his ungracious brother: the solicitude expressed was not at all inferior to the joy. And is he not shewing to *us* also the same parental tenderness? Is he not as unwilling to give *us* up to our own delusions? Yes, his language to us is precisely that which he used to Israel of old^g—]

Surely then THIS SUBJECT MAY TEACH US,

1. The evil and danger of self-righteousness—

[Self-righteousness is a more complicated evil than is generally imagined. It not unfrequently is accompanied with pride, envy, discontent, and a thousand other evil tempers reigning in the bosom; and it always involves in it a high conceit of ourselves, a supercilious contempt of others, and a

^f This gives the proper clew to the difficulties in ver. 31. The Pharisees had access to God at all times; and all the privileges they could desire were enjoyed by them (see Rom. ix. 4.) so that, whatever favour might be shewn to others, *they* could lose nothing, nor could have any reason to complain.

^g Hos. xi. 8.

rooted aversion to the Gospel method of salvation^h: moreover, if persevered in, it will infallibly leave us *self-excluded* from the kingdom of heaven. Let us pause then, and solemnly examine whether *we* be not under its dominion? Let us inquire whether we more resemble this elder brother or the repenting Prodigal? and, instead of justifying ourselves before God, let us thankfully accept his proffered mercy.]

2. The blessedness of true penitents—

[While the elder brother was agitated with evil tempers, the Prodigal was filled with peace: and while the elder brother was self-excluded from the scenes of bliss, the Prodigal had “meat to eat which the world knows not of,” and “joy with which the stranger intermeddleth not.” Such is the harvest which all shall reap who sow in tears. Who that compares the state of the two brothers would not prefer that of the penitent, even in this life? And how much more will its superiority appear, when the happiness of admission to the Father’s house, and the misery of exclusion from it, will be consummated! Let us then, if we determine (as we must) in favour of the Prodigal, go instantly, and prostrate ourselves before our offended God.]

^h Luke xviii. 11.

MDXLVII.

THE UNJUST STEWARD.

Luke xvi. 8. *And the Lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.*

THE parables never were intended to bear to the same point in every particular: some admit of a fuller, and others of a more partial application: some are to be interpreted *solely* in reference to the principal idea contained in them. It is of great importance that we should read them under this impression. If we endeavour to accommodate all their parts to the main scope, we shall both mar their beauty, and deduce from them the most fatal errors. This observation is particularly to be attended to in considering the parable before us. It will instantly remove all the cavils which have been raised against our Saviour

as a minister of sin; and it will enable us to collect much useful instruction from this valuable portion of Holy Scripture.

The text leads us to consider,

I. The wisdom of the unjust steward—

He had frequently betrayed the trust reposed in him by his lord and master. If he had not purloined, he had profusely wasted, his master's substance; and for this he was now to be discharged from his stewardship—

[It is in vain for persons to hope that they shall always escape detection. Dishonesty may be practised for awhile; but it will generally defeat its own ends. This steward had hoped to derive pleasure, if not profit, from his unfaithfulness; but in the issue it involved him in much distress and poverty. No sooner was it discovered, than it exposed him to shame, and provoked his master to dismiss him from his service.]

But he contrived a way to remedy, in a measure, the evil he had brought upon himself—

[As soon as he had received warning, he began to say, What shall I do? nor ceased from his inquiries, till he had devised a happy expedient. He felt in himself that he was too idle to work, and too proud to beg: nor had he any hopes of obtaining another situation of trust and confidence. It was probable, therefore, that he might soon experience the pressure of extreme indigence. An artful plan for supplying his wants speedily arose in his mind. He determined to make all his master's debtors accomplices in his iniquity: he remitted to every one a considerable portion of the sum he owed. Thus he secured their present friendship and future recommendations. They would not dare to oppose him, lest their own dishonesty should be revealed by him. He would be able to make them afterwards accede to any of his proposals. He cared not how much guilt he contracted, or how many souls he ruined. All which he desired, was, to secure a home till he should be otherwise provided: and doubtless his contrivance was well adapted to the end proposed.]

This device was commended by our Lord—

[Christ himself seems to be the person who gave the commendation^a: but it was the *ingenuity*, and not the *dishonesty*, that he commended. The very epithet which he gave the steward shewed his disapprobation of the *act*. The

^a It was the same person who uttered the words in the text.

text itself explicitly declares the *only* ground of our Lord's applause^b.]

It admirably illustrates (what alone our Lord intended to illustrate),

II. The comparative folly of God's own children—

“The children of this world” are very indefatigable in prosecuting their *temporal* interests; but “the children of light” ought to be incomparably more earnest in pursuing their *spiritual* interests—

[They are called “children of light,” because they are enlightened by God's word and Spirit. They have been “brought out of darkness into the marvellous light” of the Gospel. They see the vanity of all things that are visible and temporal, and the infinite importance of those that are invisible and eternal^c. They know what a strict account they must shortly give of their stewardship, and the necessity of improving every hour in securing an “everlasting habitation.” They know how much more important are their interests, more honourable their work, more certain their success, and more glorious their reward: they therefore should be more concerned about their souls than others are about their bodies; and “labour more for the meat that endureth, than others for that which perisheth^d.”]

It must be owned however that the children of this world discover more wisdom in the prosecution of *their* interests:

They seek them *more earnestly*—

[What quickness in conceiving, eagerness in maturing, and promptness in executing his plans, did the unjust steward discover^e! Thus worldly men in general find it easy to put forth the whole energy of their souls. But where is the Christian that displays such ardour in his pursuits? How rarely can the spiritual man thus engage in his work! Alas! what backwardness *to* duty, what languor *in* it, and what readiness to disengage himself *from* it, does he feel! Happy indeed would he be who could fully equal the zeal of worldlings: but Christians have to oppose the tide of their corrupt nature, while others have only to commit themselves to its impetuous current.]

They follow them *more uniformly*—

^b “*He had done wisely.*” ^c 2 Cor. iv. 18. ^d John vi. 27.

^e “*What shall I do?—I am resolved—so he called—every one—sit down quickly*”—

[The children of this world have at all times an eye to their own advantage. Though their thoughts be not immediately engaged about business, they can turn them into that channel the very instant that prospects of gain arise. But the children of light are often wholly indisposed for spiritual exercises^f. Too often do they find occasion to adopt the language of St. Paul^g— and frequently are they ready to compare themselves with the very beasts that perish^h.]

They contrive for them *more ingeniously*—

[If a worldly man have prospects of advancement he will devise a thousand means to attain his end. If he have reason to fear a loss, he will try many expedients to avert, to mitigate, or to remedy the evil. He will rarely lose any thing which his cunning will enable him to secure. But how often does the Christian suffer loss purely through his own folly! How often does he see infallible means of gain, and yet neglect to use them! and infallible means of injury, which he is not careful to shun! Many times is he forced to adopt that most humiliating confessionⁱ—]

To prevent misapprehension, we subjoin a word of CAUTION—

[Let not any one suppose that one fraud may be committed in order to prevent the consequences of another. This is too often practised: but it plunges the offender in deeper guilt and shame. God has warned us in many places what will be the reward of dishonesty^k. It is impossible that they who defraud an earthly master can be accepted of God. However their ingenuity may be admired, it will prove folly in the issue. Let every one then, who professes to be a child of light, remember the Apostle's words^l—]

To enforce the subject we conclude with suitable ADVICE—

1. Be faithful to your Lord and Master—

[If ye be Christians indeed, Christ is the Master whom ye serve. Be faithful to him, then, whether ye have little or much^m. Especially honour him in the distribution of the unrighteous mammonⁿ. He is a kind and liberal Master, that does not grudge you any thing that is good. Nevertheless he expects that you improve for him the talents he has committed to you.]

^f Gal. v. 17.

^g Rom. vii. 13, 15, 18, 19, 21—23.

^h Isai. i. 3.

ⁱ Ps. lxxiii. 22. Prov. xxx. 2.

^k 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10.

^l 1 John i. 6.

^m Prov. xxiii. 26.

ⁿ ver. 13.

2. Be diligent in his service—

[We see how diligent worldlings are in the service of the world. Let not us be surpassed by them. We have a far better Master, and an infinitely richer reward.]

3. Stand ready to give up your account to him—

[We know not how soon he will say, Give an account of thy stewardship: but it will be a joyful word to those who shall be found ready. Let us then be daily inspecting and balancing our accounts. He will then give us the *true riches*: and will bestow upon us what shall to all eternity be *our own*.^p.]

° ver. 11.

p ver. 12. Matt. xxiv. 45—47.

MDXLVIII.

PRESSING INTO THE KINGDOM.

Luke xvi. 16. *The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it.*

WHEREVER the Gospel is preached with fidelity and earnestness, the places of worship are, for the most part, well attended. And this is often made a ground of joyful congratulation. But if, instead of comparing the attendance of persons at such places of worship with that which is seen at other Churches, we were to compare it with what took place at the first introduction of Christianity, we should see in it nothing but an occasion of shame and sorrow. Under the law and the prophets, that is, during the Mosaic dispensation, there was but little of preaching: but when John, the forerunner of our Lord, came, he preached much and often; and so powerful were his ministrations, that persons of all ranks and orders pressed into that kingdom, which he sought and laboured to establish. Let us then, for our humiliation, consider,

I. The effects of John's preaching—

“He preached the kingdom of God”—

[By “the kingdom of God” I understand, the kingdom of the Messiah, or the reign of Christ in the world and in the heart. He declared that Christ was come: and he pointed him

out to the people as “that very Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world.” He called men to repentance, and to an acknowledgment of the Saviour, by being baptized in his name; and announced that as the sure and only way of obtaining the remission of their sins^a — — —]

Immediately, such was the impression on all descriptions of persons, that “every one pressed into it” —

[Most surprising was the effect of his ministrations. Persons flocked from every quarter, to be baptized of him. Pharisees and Sadducees, distant as they were from each other in their principles, equally felt the power of his word, and came to be baptized of him. Nay, all Jerusalem, and all Judæa, and all the region round about Jordan, were so wrought upon, that they actually submitted to his baptism, making public confession of their sins^b. They sought instruction also from him, every one (soldiers, publicans, and the people generally) being willing and desirous to approve his sincerity before God, by abandoning all the evils to which he had been particularly prone, and by practising those duties which would most adorn his holy profession^c. Many of them, it is to be feared, went back afterwards: but such, at the time, was the power of the Gospel as ministered by him.]

Let us compare with this,

II. The effect of Gospel ordinances in our day—

We preach the kingdom of God, even as he did—

[Our blessed Lord commanded, that “repentance and remission of sins should be preached among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem^d.” and the Apostles obeyed this injunction, preaching this doctrine to the Jews first^e, and afterwards to the Gentiles^f. The same injunction, also, do we obey. You yourselves will bear us witness, that the great subject of all our ministrations is, “repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.” Yea, like St. Paul, “we have determined to know nothing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified^g. We proclaim the Lord Jesus to be “King in Zion:” we call upon you to submit yourselves to him: we declare that “his blood was shed for the sins of the whole world^h,” and that “all who believe in him shall be justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Mosesⁱ.” In this respect we have even the advantage of John the Baptist: for he could only proclaim what the

^a Luke iii. 3.

^b Matt. iii. 5—7.

^c Luke iii. 10—14.

^d Luke xxiv. 47.

^e Acts v. 31.

^f Acts xx. 21.

^g 1 Cor. ii. 2.

^h 1 John ii. 2.

ⁱ Acts xiii. 38, 39.

Lord Jesus *should do*; whereas we declare to you what he *has done* — — —]

And what is the effect of *our ministrations*?

[Do we see *every one* pressing into this kingdom? I had almost asked, Where we do see *any one* pressing into it as he ought? Alas! the word which we preach, “comes,” to the generality, “in word only, and not in power:” with many it is regarded only as “a cunningly-devised fable:” with many who approve of it, it has no practical effect: they are pleased with it only “as with the melody of one who plays well upon an instrument^k:” and, of those who feel somewhat of its power, how few *press into* the kingdom with that earnestness which becomes them! Look and see around; are there any “flocking unto the Lord, as doves to their windows^l?” Where do we find people “*pressing*,” as it were, through all the obstacles which the world, the flesh, and the devil, can lay in their way, and “counting all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus their Lord^m?” Let the state of *our* auditors in general be viewed, and there is reason to weep over them with floods of tears. And let even the more approved amongst us be brought to the test of Scripture experience, and of by far the greater number we must “stand in doubt, whether Christ be indeed as yet truly formed in themⁿ.”]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are but little influenced by what they hear—

[Ah! how many of you are of this description! And are you content that it shall be always thus? Will you still hold fast the delusion that you shall win the race without running, and gain the victory without fighting? If success be not the portion of those who so demean themselves in relation to earthly things, how can you imagine it will in reference to heavenly things? Will it be no matter of regret to you in a dying hour, that you have been so supine and careless? or, if Satan be permitted to blind you then, will it be no grief to you when you shall open your eyes in the eternal world? O awake from your stupor: and “to-day, whilst it is called to-day, harden not your hearts, lest God should swear, in his wrath, that you shall never enter into his rest^o.”]

2. Those who feel some desire to enter into the kingdom—

[I thank God, if there be in any of you a good desire. But did you never hear what our blessed Lord has said, that

^k Ezek. xxxiii. 31, 32.

^l Isai. lx. 8.

^m Phil. iii. 8.

ⁿ Gal. iv. 19, 20.

^o Heb. iii. 7—11.

“many shall seek to enter into the kingdom, and not be able^p.” How comes this? They *seek*, with good desires; but they do not *strive* with the full bent and determination of their hearts. But *this* is necessary, indispensably necessary, to the attainment of God’s heavenly kingdom. The pursuit of it must be regarded by you as “the one thing needful^q.” It must be entered upon with the same spirit as David manifested, when he said, “One thing have I desired of the Lord, which *I will seek after*^r.” You must engage in it “with all your might^s,” and, instead of ever looking upon your attainments with complacency, or feeling yourselves at liberty to relax your ardour, you must, with Paul, “forget what is behind, and reach forward to that which is before, and press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus^t.” There must be “no looking back, after you have once put your hand to the plough^u ;” “no weariness in well-doing^x ;” you must “endure unto the end, if ever you would be saved^y ;” and, like the manslayer, never rest a moment, till you enter the gates of the heavenly city^z.]

^p Luke xiii. 24.

^q Luke x. 42.

^r Ps. xxvii. 4.

^s Eccl. ix. 10.

^t Phil. iii. 13, 14.

^u Luke ix. 62.

^x Gal. vi. 9.

^y Matt. x. 22.

^z Numb. xxxv. 11, 12.

MDXLIX.

THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS.

Luke xvi. 25. *But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivest thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.*

THE more strongly the discourses of a minister bear upon the prevailing vices of the day, the more will they, whose besetting sin is pointed out and reprobated, pour contempt upon the preacher and his word. Our blessed Lord had spoken the parable of the unjust steward, in order to shew, that every one should consider himself as responsible to God for the use he makes of that which is entrusted to him. “The Pharisees, who were covetous, immediately derided him^a.” Our Lord, however, was not to be deterred by their derision; on the contrary, he

^a ver. 14.

addressed to them a personal and severe reproof, and added another parable, that should enforce, with ten-fold energy, his preceding admonitions. He represented a rich man, after a short enjoyment of his carnal pleasures, doomed to eternal misery in hell; and a poor man, after a transient scene of sufferings on earth, exalted to a state of everlasting felicity in heaven.

In opening this parable we shall present to your view,
I. Their different conditions in this world—

The Rich Man enjoyed all that could gratify an earthly mind—

[High titles, stately mansions, superb clothing, pompous equipage, numerous attendants, sumptuous entertainments, courtly friends, and flattering sycophants, were his distinguished portion, his daily enjoyment — — — These were the things in which he took delight; nor had his vain earthly heart a thought or wish beyond them^b. Doubtless he was to many in his day an object of admiration and envy. And many amongst ourselves are ready to say, Give me but such a portion as his, and I desire no more.]

The Poor Man was as destitute as a human being could be—

[He wanted even the most common necessaries of life. In addition to this, he was “full of sores” from head to foot; without medical aid to cure them, or even a friendly hand to bind them up; so that “the very dogs came and licked them.” Unable to walk, he was carried, and, as if no man cared what became of him, was cast^c at the Rich Man’s gate, to gather a scanty and precarious subsistence from the crumbs which fell from his table. Thus destitute of food, of health, of friends, a very outcast from society, he protracted a wretched existence, till death relieved him of his sorrows.

Who would have thought that these two men were of the same species, or that, if they were, a just and merciful God should put such a difference between them?]

But our minds will be reconciled to this seeming inequality of state, if we survey,

II. Their still more different conditions in the invisible world—

The Rich Man was reduced to a state of deserved misery—

[We read not of any enormous crimes that he committed;

^b “*Thy* good things.”

^c Ἐβίβλητο.

and therefore we cannot justly impute any to him. His elegant clothing and costly fare were not in themselves sinful, provided they were such as were suited to his station in life. That which constituted his guilt in the sight of God was, that his heart was set upon them; that he sought his happiness in them rather than in God; and that he lived solely for himself, to the neglect of those, whose necessities he should have delighted to relieve. And behold, what fearful punishment this iniquity brought upon him! His career of sin was soon terminated; and nothing of all his happiness remained to him but the guilt which he had contracted by it. He was buried indeed in a sumptuous manner; but what pleasure could he receive from funeral processions, sepulchral monuments, or flattering inscriptions? Alas! his body was insensible of the honours paid to it, and his soul was enduring unutterable anguish in the flames of hell. He prayed indeed, but his prayer was now too late. Had he called upon God when he was on earth, he might have obtained all the glory of heaven: but now he was refused, though he asked no more than a momentary mitigation of his pain. He begged that a messenger might be sent to warn and to convince his five surviving brethren, who were walking securely in his delusive steps: but neither could this be granted him; nor indeed would it have been of any use to those who disregarded the testimony of the sacred records. Instead of finding any relief, he was upbraided with his having sought an earthly portion, while he neglected those things which were to endure for ever; the remembrance of which folly could not but greatly aggravate his misery. Ah! how altered now his state, from honour to ignominy, from pleasure to pain, from affluence to extremest want!

The Poor Man, on the contrary, was raised to a state of unspeakable felicity—

[As death put a speedy period to the enjoyments of the one, so it soon also terminated the sorrows of the other. Nothing is spoken of the burial of the Poor Man; he was carried unnoticed, unregretted, to the silent grave; or rather, his fellow-creatures probably rejoiced that they were rid of a public nuisance. Not but that he was honoured in his death; for though disregarded by men, he was attended by angels, who gladly received his departing spirit, and bore it on their wings to the regions of light and glory. Let our eyes now follow him to his blest abode: behold, he, who once had scarcely enough to satisfy the cravings of nature, is now sitting next to Abraham himself at the heavenly banquet^d; while the man

^d At feasts they lay on couches; so that one seemed, as it were, to be in the bosom of the person next to him. In this view, the circumstance of his being in Abraham's bosom is well worthy of notice.

who had “fared sumptuously every day” on earth, has not so much as a drop of water to cool his tongue! Nothing now remains to him of all his former sorrows, except indeed their sanctifying influence upon his soul. Now he has the good things which he sought on earth, the things in which alone he found delight. The enjoyment of the Divine presence was then his only consolation; and now it is his abiding, his ever-blessed portion.

Now let us contrast the two; and we shall confess that Lazarus with all his penury was, on the whole, an object of envy; while the Rich Man with all his indulgences was, on the whole, an object of the deepest commiseration.]

Let us LEARN from hence,

1. How vain are riches without grace!

[What could the Rich Man’s wealth procure him in this life? Nothing but food and raiment: nor were his delicacies more sweet to him, than to the cottager his homely meal. His riches could not ward off for a moment the stroke of death: much less could they “profit him in the day of wrath.” They served only to witness against him, and to “prey upon his flesh like fire.” Let not any then envy the great and gay; but rather seek to be rich in grace, and happy in the enjoyment of their God.]

2. What consolation will religion afford under the severest trials!

[Though Lazarus appeared so destitute, he doubtless had his comforts as well as his sorrows. He would console himself with such reflections as these: ‘I have no earthly treasures; but I have treasures laid up for me in heaven: I am diseased in body; but my soul flourishes in health and vigour: I am scantily supported with refuse crumbs; but I have meat to eat which the world knows not of: I am without a mortal friend to minister unto me; but God is my friend, and angels are my ministering servants: I have nothing that I can call my own in this life; but I have all the glory of heaven in the life to come.’ Yes, thousands of such considerations would raise his drooping spirits, and often render him happier than all the gratifications of sense could possibly have made him. And all who possess real religion in their hearts shall find it as conducive to their happiness in this life, as it is to their eternal felicity.]

3. How earnestly we should improve our time in preparation for eternity!

[Whether we be in prosperity or in affliction, we are hastening to the grave: the whole of this life is but as a dream:

^e Jam. v. 1—5.

death will soon terminate our present joys or sorrows : and our condition in the future world will depend entirely on the manner in which we have lived in this state of probation. God has drawn aside for a moment the veil of the invisible world ; and shewn us what we shall all be in a little time : yes ; all of us shall be banquetting in heaven, or agonizing with inexpressible, unintermitted anguish in hell ; and in whichever state we be, all transition from it will be prevented by an “ impassable gulf.” Let us endeavour to realize these awful truths. Let us believe what the Scriptures have told us respecting the issue of a worldly life. Let us pity those who, like the five brethren, are hastening in the delusive paths of ease and pleasure to the place of torment. And let us live now, as we shall wish we had lived, when our state shall be for ever fixed.]

MDL.

THE HOPELESS STATE OF THOSE WHO DISREGARD THE
SCRIPTURES.

Luke xvi. 29—31. *Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets : let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham : but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.*

IT is painful to reflect how men follow the footsteps of their forefathers, without ever seriously inquiring whither they tend. If we examine the records of those who have gone before us, we find that, for the most part, they lived to themselves, rather than unto God. “ This their way was their folly ; yet their posterity approve their saying^a,” and, like their predecessors, rush forward thoughtlessly to their own destruction. A very striking illustration of this is given us by one who was himself a spectator of the fact which he records^b. A flock of sheep, whilst going over a bridge, were frightened ; and one of them jumped over the side of the bridge : the rest, imagining that he who led the way was safe and happy, followed in succession ; and were all carried

^a Ps. xlix. 11, 13.

^b Baxter.

down a rapid river, and involved in one common, but unsuspected, ruin. Thus the different generations of men pass away; and each surviving race, concluding of course that those who went before are happy, follow the same fatal track, till it is too late to remedy their error.

The passage before us will illustrate this. It is part of a parable, wherein our Lord represents a rich man as living in luxurious indolence, till he is surprised by death, and made to feel the wrath of an avenging God. He had left his riches among five surviving brethren, who were all walking in his delusive steps, without ever once considering in what they would issue. The Rich Man, unable to prevail for even a drop of water to cool his tongue, requests, that if Lazarus may not be sent to *him* to mitigate *his* torment, he may be sent to his brethren to warn *them* of the danger in which *they* were, and to guard them against a continuance in their fatal security. But neither could this be granted: Abraham tells him, that they had the Scriptures in their hands; and that, if they would not attend to them, any message from the dead would be of no avail.

From this solemn declaration we shall take occasion to shew,

I. The use and office of the Holy Scriptures—

This is plainly intimated in our text. The Rich Man had solicited that Lazarus might be sent to warn his brethren, lest they also should come into that place of torment. The reply was, that they had the Scriptures, and should attend to them: whence it appears that,

The use of the Scriptures is to guide men to heaven—

[They are intended to shew us the way thither, and to guard us against every erroneous path — — — This they do with the utmost plainness and fidelity; insomuch that, if studied with diligence and prayer, they will assuredly “make us wise unto salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus.” — — — There certainly are passages in them difficult to be understood: but the great and essential truths are stated in so clear a manner, that he who runs may read them. Who that searches the

Scriptures can doubt the issue of a carnal and worldly life? “To be carnally-minded is death.” Or who can doubt the acceptance of a sinner that humbles himself before God, and flees to Christ for refuge? Will it be found that any one was ever cast out, who came unto God through Christ? In a word, there is no instruction wanted, which is not contained in the sacred volume, and conveyed too in the most edifying manner. Its warnings are most solemn, its invitations most earnest, its expostulations most affectionate, its promises most enlarged — — — If only we pay attention to them, we shall infallibly “be kept from the paths of the destroyer^e,” and have “our feet guided into the way of peace.”]

For this end they are fully sufficient—

[Nothing is wanting in *them*, God himself being witness — — — The Old Testament writers and the New, alike declare the sufficiency of Scripture for every end that can be desired^d — — — It is “the rod of God’s strength, whereby he effects his work upon the souls of men, quickening the dead^e, sanctifying the unclean^f, comforting the afflicted^g, and saving the lost^h — — — And all that is wanting to render the word effectual, is to get it applied to our hearts by the Spirit of Godⁱ: when so applied, it becomes “the power of God to the salvation of our souls^k.”]

It must be remembered, however, that whilst the Scriptures are so powerful to save those who use them aright, they declare most unequivocally,

II. The hopeless state of those who disregard them—

The Rich Man imagined, that, if some new method were used for the conversion of his brethren, it would be successful; but Abraham informed him, that, where the Scriptures were ineffectual, not even a messenger from the dead would be of any avail;

1. To convince the unbelieving—

[Though a messenger from the dead might be instrumental to awaken the attention of a person to the Scriptures, he could not convince him of any one truth contained in them. For what could he say that is not contained in the Scriptures? He could only affirm, that the truth of what they declared was now ascertained and felt by him, and placed beyond the

^c Ps. xvii. 4.

^d Ps. xix. 7—11. 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17.

^e Ps. cxix. 93. Jam. i. 18.

^f John xv. 3. Eph. v. 26.

^g Ps. cvii. 20.

^h Jam. i. 21.

ⁱ 1 Thess. i. 5.

^k Rom. i. 16.

reach of doubt. But this has been already declared by all the inspired writers, who in successive ages sealed the truth with their blood. Besides, the Scriptures corroborate their testimony by a thousand other proofs, which a person coming from the dead could not supply: and consequently, he who rejects the weightier evidence, would not be likely to be convinced by that which would be comparatively light. But the experiment has been made. Lazarus was raised from the dead: but many who saw him after his restoration to life, so far from being convinced by the miracle, sought to put him to death, lest a conviction should be wrought by it in the minds of others. Moreover, when our Lord rose from the dead, the soldiers, who guarded his tomb, went and announced it to the Jewish rulers: but they, instead of being suitably impressed by it, and acknowledging the truth of Christ's Messiahship, instantly fabricated a falsehood, and bribed the soldiers to attest it; and the soldiers actually accepted the bribe, and attested the falsehood, and joined in denying the truth of Christ's resurrection, even within an hour after they themselves had beheld it: so little power has any sight, however terrific or unquestionable, to convince a mind that is biassed by prejudice, and blinded by the devil.]

2. To convert the impenitent—

[The sight of a person clothed with the splendour of heaven or the terrors of hell, would surprise and alarm; but it would never convert a soul. The same lusts that counteract the influence of the written word, would soon efface the impressions which any such spectacle might produce. The love of sin would still remain as strong as ever; and a desire to defer to a more convenient season that work, to which men are so radically averse. The effect of such a sight might be strong at the time; but it would gradually wear away; and probably ere long become a subject of derision. We know how frequently such declensions are found after a person has been alarmed by some awful providence or some awakening discourse: we know also how the Israelites "forgot the Lord at the Red Sea, *even at the Red Sea:*" and we are well assured, that they who can withstand the voice of God in his word, would equally withstand the voice of a fellow-creature, whether he should come down from heaven, or ascend from hell. Even if heaven and hell were opened to their view, the impression would be only transient; for, to convert a soul, is the work of God¹; and his power only can effect it^m.]

We may LEARN from hence,

1. In what an awful condition are the *impenitent hearers* of the Gospel!

¹ Eph. ii. 10.

^m 1 Cor. iii. 5—7. and v. 4.

[Many hear the Gospel, and approve it, who yet are never truly converted by it, never stirred up to flee from the wrath to come, never quickened to lay hold on eternal life: religion never becomes the one business of their lives: they never engage in it as the voluptuary in his pleasures, or as the worldling in his pursuits: they may go on in a round of observances; but they want the life and power of godliness: their religion is destitute of zest, and earnestness, and uniformity — — Now these persons withstand the most powerful engine which God himself employs for the conversion of the world. If they had never heard the sound of the Gospel, there might be hope that they would submit to it as soon as it should reach their ears: but they have heard it, and continue to resist its power, or to yield to it only a feigned and limited obedience. Let such persons consider the warning given them by St. James: for, whilst they are “hearers only, and not doers, of the law, they fearfully deceive their own souls: it is the doer of it only, that shall be blessed in his deeds.” — — — Let us then examine what effects the Gospel produces upon us; let us see what conformity there is in our spirit and conduct to the examples of Christ and his Apostles: it is not by a mere outward morality that we must judge of ourselves, but by the spirituality of our minds, and the heavenliness of our lives. It is to *this*, that “Moses, and the Prophets” invite us; and, if we “hear them” not to this end, we hear them altogether in vain.]

2. How inexcusable are they who will *not hear* the Gospel!

[Various are the grounds on which men slight the everlasting Gospel: some think it too early in life to pay any attention to it; others are too busy; others take up a prejudice against it; others are deterred by the fear of man. But what would *they* say to us, who are now fixed in their eternal state, if they were permitted to come and declare their minds? Would the blest inhabitant of heaven tell us, that his reward is too small a compensation for his labour, and that he regrets having paid so much attention to the concerns of his soul? Or would the wretched companion of devils and damned spirits represent his sufferings as unworthy to be regarded, and tell us that we need give ourselves no trouble to escape them? No: whether it should be the Rich Man from hell, or Lazarus from heaven, that should come to us, his testimony would be, “The fear of the Lord, *that* is wisdom, and to depart from evil, *that* is understanding.” Beware therefore, brethren, lest you suffer any thing to divert your attention from the Gospel

ⁿ Jam. i. 22—25.

of Christ. Be thankful that it is not yet too late for you to lift up your voice in prayer to God. Read the Scriptures, with prayer for the teachings of God's Spirit, and improve every opportunity of hearing them explained to you in public: they are given you as "a light shining in a dark place;" and it becomes you to "take heed to them" without delay^o. With our Lord, therefore, I say, "Search the Scriptures;" or, in the words of our text, "You have Moses and the Prophets, HEAR THEM."]

3. What cause of thankfulness have they who *have heard it with effect!*

[This is a mercy to you from God, the richest mercy that God himself could bestow. It is God alone can "give us an understanding, that we may know him that is true:" and if he had not opened your understandings, you would still have been as blind as ever. Know then to whom you are indebted: and let it be the labour of your lives to express a just sense of the obligations conferred upon you. But how shall you do this to the best purpose? I answer, Look around you, and see how many there are regardless of the Scriptures, and of the state to which they are hastening. Unhappy creatures! they have many friends or relatives that would gladly come from heaven or from hell to warn them: but no such intercourse can be allowed. They have the Scriptures, both of the Old and New Testament; and if they disregard these, no other means of salvation will be afforded them. But it is not prohibited to *living* saints to warn them: *you* may have access to them as often as you please, and even a more favourable access, than a disembodied spirit could have. To you they may listen without any terror or dismay. Improve then the opportunity that is afforded you. "Freely ye have received, freely give." It is not for yourselves only that God has given you light, it is for others also; that you may put it on a candlestick, and give light to all around you. You have some brethren or friends; go to them as an angel of light: and may God succeed your endeavours, to the salvation of many souls!]

^o 2 Pet. i. 19.

END OF VOL. XII.

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